Guitar MAGAZINE

AUGUST 2020
ISSUE 383
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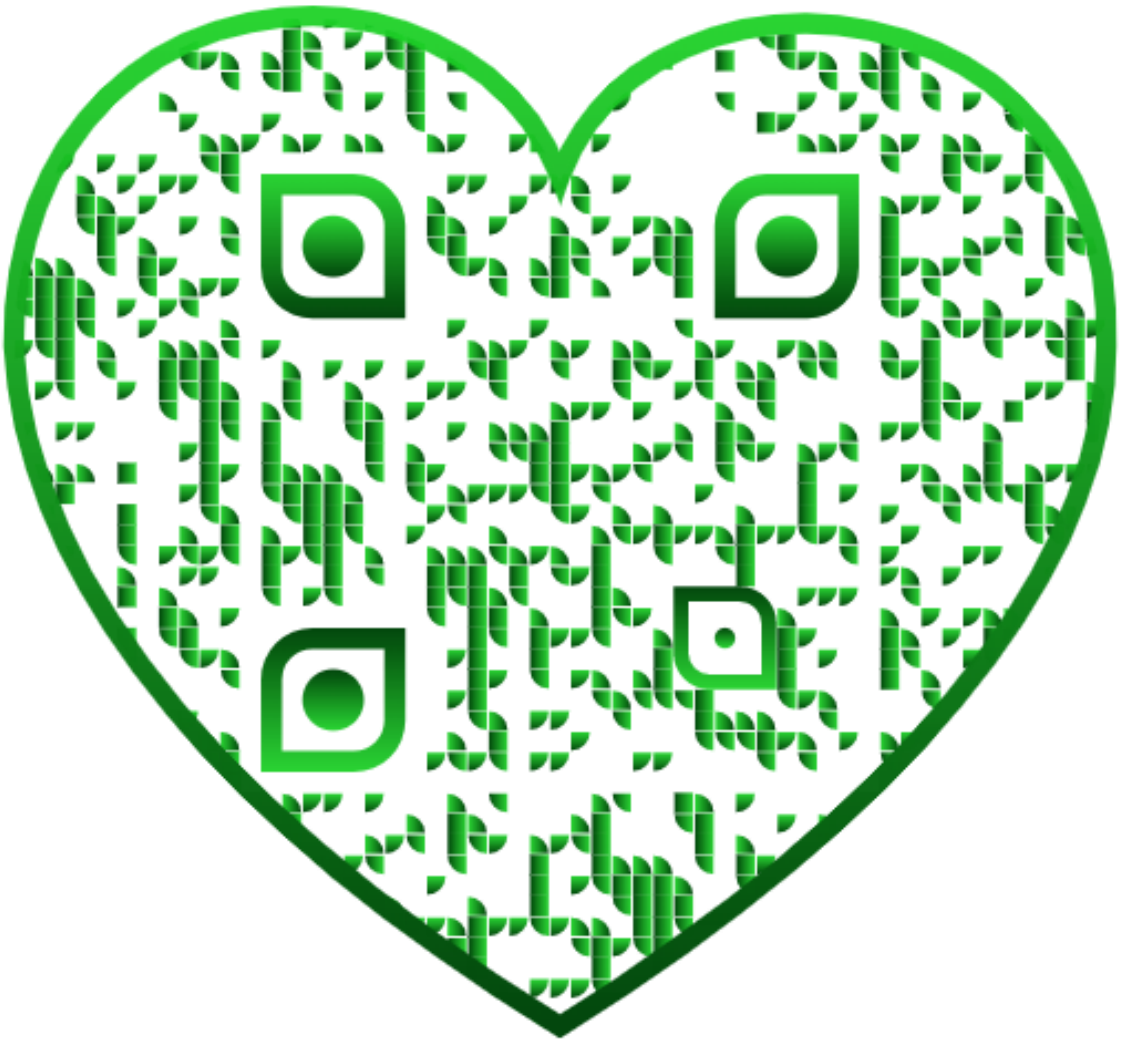

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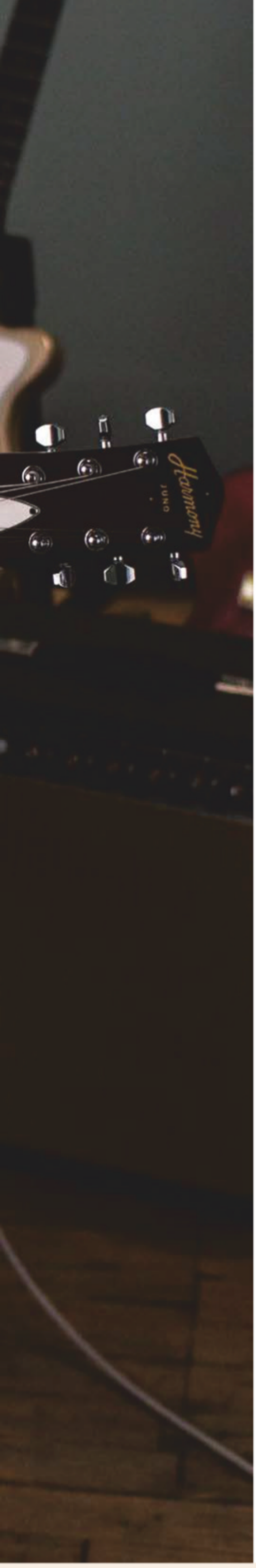

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EDITOR'S LETTER

RED LIGHT FEVER

This lockdown malarkey is getting pretty boring now, right? Apparently not. Since last month, we've been bombarded with yet more stellar examples of home-brew luthiery that prove that many of you have taken the proverbial bovine by the horns and embarked on some ambitious guitar-making projects. My favourite of your builds so far is featured in Fretbuzz on page eight but we'll hopefully have room to publish more examples next month. And, if your DIY six-string needs a sunburst paint job, don't rattle that can until you've checked out our guide to spraying a 1950s-style 'burst on p124.

Once the lacquer has cured and you've wired it up, you'll want to capture your new creation's dulcet tones in order to show it off online. Don't know where to start when it comes to guitar recording? It's easier to get pro-quality tones than you might think, and this month we've dedicated 14 pages to the topic in our comprehensive cover feature, which begins on p40. If, like many of us, your summer holiday plans have been nixed by the pandemic, it might finally be time to turn the riffs and chord sequences you've been noodling around with for years into something a little more substantial.

Let us know how you get on and, if you've been struck by a particularly inspiring online guitar performance recently, do get in touch. We're always on the lookout for undiscovered gems and fantastic players who might otherwise escape our attention. Don't forget to head to Guitar.com for your daily helping of all things guitar too – I'll see you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

CORONAMASTERY

Dear Chris, like so many people in recent weeks and months, I have been furloughed by my employer. After well over 35 years working without a break, save for the odd holiday and a handful of days of sick-leave, adapting to time at home in lockdown, as I'm sure many people will empathise with, has been a challenge, especially as it has also put a stop to gigs and rehearsals. Domestic repairs, decorating touch-ups, a bit of gardening and reading, only go so far in enabling a sense of fulfilment from the daily efforts. And for me (others may disagree!) there is a limit to how many times you can re-arrange the order of one's effects pedals.

Initially, in search of a sense of acheivement, I tried to learn Spanish – and I still commit an hour or two each day to this – but then the May edition of *Guitar Magazine* dropped through the letterbox. After a quick squirt of the polythene wrapper with disinfectant, I read your editor's letter. It triggered the embryo of an idea. By this stage, what I had begun to realise was that I didn't want to let this notable and significant period in all our lives and our history slip by without having achieved something notable and ideally tangible to mark it with, and maybe even pass that thing on to my children someday. The solution was clear; I would create my own guitar, and in some way, its build would reflect the situation.

Prior to this, I had never gone much further than adjusting a truss-rod and changing a pickup, and wow, how anyone makes soldering look easy beats me! But the whole process of considering what type of guitar to build, which wood, what sort of neck, whether it would fit, what type of finish, colour, relic or not, which pickups and which parts – and then investigating whether all were available online – suddenly made the days seem short and being furloughed seem like an opportunity. After days of deliberation and enquiry, my mind was made up, I would build something akin to a cross between a Telecaster and a Jazzmaster – and it would be known as the Furlough Coronamaster!

I've never been completely convinced by artificially relic'd guitars, but on the other hand, I like a vintage character, and perhaps a suitable finish or 'feel', would be one which reflected the amount of time it seems I've been isolated! So I decided on a nitrocellulose-finished body, nickel hardware and a simple, oiled neck – assuming I could source all items and materials. Four way switching and 'reverse' controls – these are after all, topsy-turvy times – also seemed like the way to go.

If I could pull it off, when I'm able to return to work (assuming I still have a job to go to), and we're all able to shrug off this terrible period and re-engage with a safer and more sustainable world, it would be a reminder of what we all endured.

A few weeks later, the project was completed, I'm pleased with the results and have a sense of having achieved what I set out to do. I've added a few photos so you can judge for yourself. Thanks for all the great articles and inspiration.

CHRISTOPHER WIDGER, VIA EMAIL

Thanks for sharing your story with us Chris, that's a seriously fine-looking guitar you've built there, and one that we hope will continue to bring you great joy when this challenging period is a distant memory. All the best and do let us know if you embark on any more home-build projects!

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© Nic Slade

ONES TO WATCH

KINGS DAUGHTERS

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

Endorsed by Orange and working alongside Brian May on their debut single, this hotly tipped three-piece are making a name for themselves. Guitarist Isabell Lysell tells us more

With legendary Queen guitarist Brian May taking the reins as producer on their debut single, *Get Up*, it's easy to see why the upper echelons of the guitar industry are talking excitedly about Kings Daughters. Formed in London, the all-female trio are pushing the boundaries of what's expected of modern rock acts.

Lead vocalist and lyricist Talia Dean has dealt with anxiety for years. She takes solace in her writing process, and was inspired to pen *Get Up* following advice from her peers. The band are donating 10 per cent of the proceeds from each purchase of the song to British mental health charity Mind. Here, guitar player Isabell Lysell details how it all began, from the band's 12-bar blues beginnings to working with legendary artists and dealing with the impact of COVID-19.

What inspired you to pick up a guitar?

"It was my best friend's idea. We were 10 years old and did everything together, so I kind of just went along with it. After taking lessons for about a year, it was a very simple 12-bar blues part that sparked something in me. Since then, guitar has been my passion."

Tell us about your guitar and pedal setup.

"My main guitar is a Gibson ES-333. I've never found a guitar that just fits me quite like this one. I love the soulful tone of hollowbodies. I definitely have a thing for vintage sounds. My 'board is currently a mess of old 1980s modulation pedals and a few too many ODs and distortions.

I'm really into my Pearl analogue chorus at the moment and I'm loving the TC Spark booster in all its subtle glory. But the Pickletech Berkatron is my secret weapon. I like to walk a thin line between slick soul and total apocalypse."

How would you describe your guitar playing and your approach to the guitar?

"I am not a guitar hero; I couldn't shred to save my life. But there's a lot of feel and flow in my playing. I'm really just a writer and the guitar is my voice. I think of my sound as a mix of blues and rhythm 'n' blues, with a hint of grunge."

How did you develop a relationship with Brian May?

"Brian has been a friend of Talia's for some time and he's always been supportive of our music in one way or another. But when he heard our demo for *Get Up* for the first time, he was eager to get involved so he invited us over to his studio and that's how the collaboration started."

What was it like working with the Queen icon on your debut single?

"From a guitarist's point of view, it was obviously mindblowing. I will never forget the day we put down his guitars. Being in the room with him just warming up gave me chills. That's when I realised that I was actually in the presence of a legend! It was humbling. He taught us a lot about patience and perfectionism. He works the old-school way, and really takes his time to make sure that each and every take is the best it can possibly be."

You're also an Orange ambassador. What is it about Orange amps that appeals to you?

"I've been a huge fan of Orange for years, so I am honoured to be an Orange ambassador. I play the TremLord 30 and it's a dream. I really need a kick-ass clean sound from my amp and the TremLord is just beautifully crisp and deliciously creamy. I use a lot of colour and extensions on my chords. I like a lot of clarity."

What's been your most memorable gig?

"My favourite gigs are the small sweaty ones, where the room is packed and the floor is sticky. The gigs where it feels like the artists and the audience are all in it together. Unfortunately, COVID-19 has cancelled all gigs indefinitely, so the only way to perform right now is virtually on our own and the band's social channels. We're hoping to go on tour next year though."

When can we expect your next release?

"We're currently finishing off the last bits for our second single, which will be out by the end of the summer. Our debut album is in the process of being written and recorded. The track list hasn't been set in stone yet but my current favourite work-in-progress is a song called *Moon*, which I could best describe as a Soundgarden-meets-Christina Aguilera ballad with eerie Radiohead vibes."

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

"Hopefully still here, still working and still learning. Making new sounds and playing out of my comfort zone. I would love to work on cinematic music. Maybe in 10 years' time I'll be a film composer."

Tell us something about yourself that has nothing to do with guitar.

"I collect rocks and crystals. They're scattered across my flat. I keep a lot of plants too. I love anything earthy and botanical. I live in a busy area of London, so I try to keep nature close to me any way I can."

Kings Daughters' debut single *Get Up* is out now

COMPETITION

WIN A GORDON SMITH GS DELUXE SEMI SOLID
WORTH £1,699

Since purchasing Gordon Smith – and dropping the hyphen – back in 2015, Auden owner Doug Sparkes has set about reviving the British electric guitar brand and equipping it to compete in an increasingly competitive market, all the while maintaining the UK manufacturing ethos that GS is known and loved for.

Gordon Smith guitars are hand-built to order in the sleepy market town of Higham Ferrers in Northamptonshire, and numerous aspects are up for customisation. The GS Deluxe Semi Solid competition prize has three non-standard options: metallic paint, Gotoh 21:1 ratio tuners and X Chrome hardware. It also sports a chambered mahogany body with a bound maple cap, plus a mahogany neck and rosewood fretboard.

With its compact form and 24.6-inch scale-length, you're in Gibson teritory in terms of feel and tonality, but those wax-potted humbuckers can also operate in single-coil mode, so there's plenty of versatility lurking inside too. To be in with a chance of winning this guitar in your choice of blue or silver metallic finish, head to the link below and answer the following question. Good luck!

When was Gordon Smith founded?

a) 1990 **b)** 1984 **c)** 1974

Enter at: guitar.com/competitions

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THE PLAYLIST

Austin Tufts (left), Raphaelle Standell-Preston and Taylor Smith

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ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

BRAIDS
SHADOW OFFERING

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

With former Death Cab For Cutie guitarist Chris Walla manning the desk, Braids have rediscovered the joys of the guitar, from its innate imperfections to the spontaneity it can bring to performances

Canadian band Braids have always sought to manipulate guitars to the point of being unrecognisable, and with former Death Cab For Cutie guitarist Chris Walla in the producer's chair for their fourth LP *Shadow Offering*, they entered into a new world of sonic experimentation. Here, guitarist and bassist Taylor Smith picks out the band's five favourite guitar tracks on the album, from chorus pedal employment to an unorthodox a rotary speaker.

ECLIPSE

"This was our first taste of the front-and-centre role the guitar would come to play on this record. While tracking, we were uneasy over what elements would lead the mixes, and how the myriad instruments would fit together. We'd never recorded this way – producer at the console, amps and live tracking sessions, capture over construct.

"It required a leap of faith on our part, something a group of three highly strung control freaks admittedly struggled with. With *Eclipse*, Raphaelle and Chris experimented with wonky open tunings for deep and resonant chords. We also discovered chorus, something we'd foolishly avoided for years. With Chris's guidance, we coloured outside our comfort zone. Listening to the first mix draft was a turning point in our process. After months spent chasing an ephemeral idea of what guitars might bring to our songs, we finally developed the film, so to speak, and the image staring back at us was bold, expansive and all-encompassing. Needless to say, we were pleasantly reassured that what we were striving for was possible."

SNOW ANGEL

"At once jarring and visceral, the tracking for *Snow Angel* was also a moment of joy. It was a moment of exalted discovery. After laying down the song's basic structure, Raphaelle had asked to be set up in the live room on a whim, amps pinned, for a few takes of unscripted overdubs. It was a moment of flexing and experimenting with the musicality of an extremely loud amp and, for Raphaelle, the birth of an emotional conduit just as immediate as the human voice, to provide emotional armour, and a violent counterpart to the album's most confessional and raw poetry."

FEAR OF MEN

"This song is Austin's shining guitar moment. Austin doesn't play guitar. He's a drummer and, as such, had a spare hand to lend during our guitar-tracking sessions. With the amps cranked, we set him up in the live room and got him to be a real live rotary speaker. Microphone in hand, he spun around in the room doing his best flanger impression. The resulting audio is as bespoke a swirl effect as one could hope for."

YOUNG BUCK

"We mixed *Shadow Offering* in our Montreal studio, which has two rooms, control and live. We spent a month mixing, and a typical day saw Chris and Mike, our mix engineer, in the control room working on a mix, while we spent the day in the live room. We would reconvene once in a while to share progress, listen to mixes, and trade song progress back and forth. We'd been battling with the groove in *Young Buck*, struggling to get the mix to lock. Then it suddenly came into focus. It was a relief. We didn't ask too many questions at the time, and it was only while digging through stems, long after the mixes were wrapped, that we discovered Chris had clandestinely been tucking layer upon layer of palm muted guitar parts into the mix, in an effort to glue the song together."

JUST LET ME

"Stories, process and memories aside, *Just Let Me* is our favourite guitar moment on the record. Every step of the way, the song is structured around creating this luscious and blooming key change, centred on two interlocking guitars. If, at the outset of this record, we wanted to take a swing at a guitars-as-centrepiece sound, this is the moment in which we unapologetically enjoy the fruits of this journey."

***Shadow Offering* is out now on Braids Musique Inc and Secret City Records**

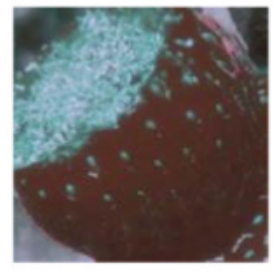
This month's essential listening for guitar lovers

ELVIS COSTELLO
No Flag

Costello, the only credited performer on this song recorded over three days at Suomenlinnan Studio in Finland, describes it as having the "Helsinki Sound". He plays drums, guitar, Hammond organ and bass.

NOFX
Thatcher Fucked The Kids

The lead track from their split covers EP with Frank Turner sees punk legends NOFX sharing their take on this Turner track. It opens with brash guitars before moving into characteristic ska-punk territory.



THURSTON MOORE
Strawberry Moon

Recorded at the Daydream Library in London, this nine-minute instrumental written for three guitars is an eerie, melancholic and hypnotic reminder of the Sonic Youth founder's guitar talents.

BUZZARD BUZZARD BUZZARD
Double Denim Hop (Disco Version)

This disco version of the South Wales quartet's 2018 sleeper hit is packed with 1970s-style guitars and boasts a laidback vibe that could be the perfect soundtrack to your summer.

MATT BERNINGER
Serpentine Prison

The title track from The National frontman's debut solo LP frames Matt Berninger's characteristically word-weary vocals in a simple arrangement of strummed acoustic guitars, brushed drums, organ and brass.

JOE BONAMASSA
When One Door Opens

Co-written with Cream lyricist Pete Brown and long-time collaborator Kevin Shirley, Bonamassa's latest is an emotive ballad recorded at Abbey Road that explodes into classic rock riffage on the four-minute mark.

BRIGHT EYES
One And Done

The third single from Bright Eyes' upcoming LP *One And Done* features collaborators Flea and QOTSA drummer Jon Theodore, plus vocals from Miwi La Lupa and an orchestral arrangement by Suzie Katayama.

CALIGULA'S HORSE
Slow Violence

Australia's pre-eminent prog-metal titans return with a blitz of down-tuned guitar entwined with catchy off-kilter melodies. It's rhythmically challenging but a massively rewarding listen.

HINDS
The Play

Hinds' third album sees the act cast aside any aspersions about being little more than a reverb-drenched slacker-rock group and step up as festival anthem composers. This track is packed with grooves and hooks.

SPORTS TEAM
Camel Crew

This raucous Britpop-inspired track takes aim at former Sony signees HMLTD with the lyric, "go to Goldsmiths and dye their fringes". Expect galloping guitars, chanting vocals and plenty of attitude and excitement.

HAIM
Don't Wanna

The latest from the trio's forthcoming third LP was written with former Vampire Weekend man Rostam Batmanglij, and sports an organic, punchy guitar melody underpinning the vocals.

C DIAB
Street Scenes

The solo project of Vancouver's C Diab, *White Whale* follows 2018's acclaimed *Exit Rumination*. Lead single *Street Scenes* is exquisite and emotive, with bowed guitars interacting with flutes, synthesisers and tape.

COMPETITION

WIN A PAIR OF NEUMANN NDH 20 STUDIO HEADPHONES
WORTH £419!

Thanks to legendary microphones such as the U 87, the Neumann name is one of the most respected in the world of studio recording. Over the past 15 years, the German firm, working alongside its pro-audio sister brand Klein+Hummel, has been expanding beyond microphones to produce a stellar range of loudspeakers and monitors, all of which uphold its reputation for quality.

More recently, Neumann has entered the world of studio headphones with these sleek, strong and fuss-free cans. Designed primarily for monitoring and mixing, the NDH 20s offer a linear and well-balanced sound image, akin to those of Neumann's acclaimed studio monitors. Using newly designed drivers with high-gauss neodymium magnets, and an extended frequency response that ranges from 5Hz to 30kHz, the NDH 20 headphones are a sensational option for mix engineers and entertainment audiophiles alike.

To enter our competition for the chance to win these superb headphones, simply head to the link below and answer the following question.

When was Neumann founded?

a) 1928 **b)** 1958 **c)** 1978

Enter at: guitar.com/competitions

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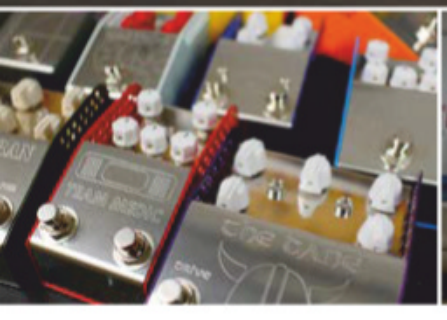

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INTRODUCING

ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER

Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever (L-R): Fran Keany, Joe White, Joe Russo, Marcel Tussie, Tom Russo

With their second album earning fevered reviews from all quarters, this five-piece from Melbourne show no signs of slowing down. Here, guitarist Joe White talks cosmic rambling, hollowbody Gretsches and why going home can be the best creative medicine

WORDS HUW BAINES

The second album from Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever begins with a moment of delayed gratification. About 10 seconds into its opening song, they string out a spidery riff, waiting for Marcel Tussie's snappy snare and driving hi-hat to skate into view. Once they're all in the same place, *The Second Of The First* kicks on towards the horizon. It sounds like summer and friendship and cold beers and long nights with nothing to do but talk shit and make plans.

With their 2018 debut LP *Hope Downs*, Rolling Blackouts followed up a brace of well-received EPs with a set of detailed jangle-pop sketches that they've filled in with lurid splashes of colour on its magnificent successor, *Sideways To New Italy*. The Melbourne quintet – guitarist-vocalists Joe White, Tom Russo and Fran Keaney, bassist Joe Russo, and drummer Marcel Tussie – have loosened their vice-like grip on the breezy blueprints of their early work just a little, allowing cosmic rambling and flashes of heady emotion to augment their sound.

BACK DOWN UNDER

Album two's story begins with the band landing back in Australia after wrapping up touring their debut. With miles on the road filling the bags beneath their eyes, they set about getting used to being at home again only for a fog of detachment to take hold. After so long away, they'd lost track of what it meant to navigate familiar streets. As well as scratching an itch for more sweet jams, their new music ensures that won't happen again. "We'd been home for a few months and it felt different," says White. "We started writing songs that spoke to that idea. We wrote love songs, songs of connection, songs of hope."

The LP's title has something to add to this conversation. New Italy is a village of about 200 inhabitants in New South Wales' Northern Rivers district, close to where Tussie is from. It's a tiny place just a short hop from the Pacific Highway, and it's devoted to telling the stories of its founders and those of other Italian immigrants. It wears its cultural history on its landscape in the form of museums and monuments, and it doesn't forget. Rolling Blackouts have tried to mimic that dynamic here.

"WE USE THE GUITAR AS A STRONG VOICE IN OUR MUSIC AND WE CREATE LEAD BREAKS THAT ARE ALMOST CHORUSES IN THEMSELVES"

"It's this idea of taking home with you," says White. "Taking what you love wherever you go. What we tried to do was put ideas of our family all through this record. My partner and a good friend of the band, they're on the opening track in a little spoken-word part. A friend of ours, Laura Jean, did some vocals and saxophone. We were trying to keep what we love close to us."

But *Sideways To New Italy* didn't emerge perfectly formed. Its thematic concerns came into greater focus once its tracklist took shape, with Rolling Blackouts permitting themselves a more open-ended writing process in search of material that could keep them engaged over long periods of time.

"We deliberately tried to have the songs less written before we brought them to the band," says White. "We used a much more collaborative approach. Songs like *Cars In Space*, *The Second Of The First*, and *Cameo* were only very loosely put together before they came into the room."

It's an approach that had worked for the band before, even if it elongated their core writing processes. "All the songs we'd written in the past where we'd used this approach are the ones we still get the most excited about," adds White. "We wanted to try and capture that feeling as much as we could. In the end, that method might have created a long way around writing the songs, because it did take a lot of time. There was a lot of trial and error, and a lot of jamming and listening back. It didn't always fall together beautifully at first. It took its time but that's okay."

HOOK LINE

Pushing back against this rambling exercise was the band's nature as a hook-focused outfit. Their music might cross paths with post-punk, sun-bleached west-coast rock and the sounds of Aussie grafters such as The Saints but it chiefly exists to provide shots of melody. The interplay between White, Keaney and Russo is essentially a relay, with the baton passed between them as they complement each other's vocals with riffs that carry their own addictive weight. "We use the guitar as a strong voice in our music and we create lead breaks that are almost choruses in themselves," says White.

Sideways To New Italy was recorded at Melbourne's Head Gap with Burke Reid, whose CV boasts records with Australian indie-rock royalty in The Drones and Courtney Barnett, plus a recent outing behind the console on Julia Jacklin's dreamy *Crushing* LP.

"We'd never worked with a producer before," says White. "To have someone else in the room who's being an advocate for the listener, the outsider, was so important. It was a real eye-opener for us."

Reid's presence helped the band in many ways, chief among them, how to better structure their songs. "We thought, 'We can't write another *Hope Downs*'," says White. "We took that as a reason to be more experimental in all sorts of ways. Burke was the outside influence that we needed for grounding and direction. To think about songs that deeply is something we'd never done before. It taught us how a song can be greater than the sum of its parts when each part holds up another, like how a bassline can help the vocal line. In the past we would have ploughed through without thinking about that as much. He was able to get us to articulate what we were trying to do, and gave us a reason to do it."

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"I HAD A WALL OF AMPS AND HAD SO MUCH FUN THE FIRST FEW DAYS, GOING THROUGH EACH TRACK FIGURING OUT WHICH GUITAR AND AMP TO USE. I FULLY NERDED OUT"

White may be selling Rolling Blackouts short here. Their three guitarists have been sharing space on concise songs for a while, operating in tandem with one another in a manner that suggests a deep understanding of the nuts and bolts of their sound. Keaney's acoustic is a textural element, flitting in and out of the frame, while Russo's playing is wedded to his family guitar – a '59 Bigsby-equipped Gretsch hollowbody – in a manner that suggests as much self-discipline as it does thrashy Neil Young-style punch.

"Tom's guitar sound is exactly the same for each song," says White. "That's no secret. We've always stuck with that. It's this gnarly Gretsch tone. He writes his lines, and we come with lines that sound good on his guitar. I provide that point of difference."

That point of difference often comes in the form of lead parts that spiral away from the songs' core melodies in pyrotechnic fashion, utilising the band's metronomic rhythm section as an anchor. *Sideways To New Italy* has a little more grit under its fingernails than *Hope Downs* did, a canny decision that adds visibility to White's slashing counterpoints.

"That was a product of having a lot of different guitars, amps and pedals at my disposal," he says. "I had a wall of amps and had so much fun on the first few days going through each track figuring out which guitar and amp to use. I wrote down all the settings, and fully nerded out, which I've never done before. I've always just plugged in and let rip. I took a more methodical approach to finding the right sound for each song. Burke's got a great ear for that kind of thing. We had a lot of discussions about tones.

"It's the melody that's the most important thing. We start with that, and the tone of my guitar is window dressing to an extent. I don't want to diminish it too much but there are two things that inform the listener about what kind of music this is: the snare tone and the guitar tone. We've got all these clean tones, we've got an acoustic guitar, we've got a punchy snare."

White leans into Rolling Blackouts' surf side with his gear, relying heavily on a red Fender Mustang that he picked up after a beloved Tele was stolen from his car a few years ago. "I mingled a fair bit [on the album] but the red Mustang is all over it," he says. "I recently put Lollar pickups in it, maybe the week before we started recording. They'll do anything you ask them to. There was also a '67 Jag in the studio that had an incredibly responsive whammy bar, you just had to touch it and you had this beautiful thing going on."

As a whole, *Sideways To New Italy* is packed with beautiful things going on. It's a loose, exciting ride that provides an immediate dose of escapism. It's music for wide open skies and last-second diversions. That sort of freedom runs bone deep. "I grew up playing guitar but never had lessons or anything. Maybe that's got something to do with my different approach," says White. "I like to get rid of any thoughts and let the fingers go, see what happens."

Sideways To New Italy is out now on Sub Pop

FACING PAGE Joe White performing with his Fender Pawn Shop Mustang Special

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

JIM ROOT

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

For two decades now, Jim Root has formed half of Slipknot's brutal six-string assault. As he steps into the rarefied air of his fourth signature model with Fender, we talk classic designs, playing with lightsabers and why he still finds guitar solos stressful

Jim Root's verdict on lockdown life is succinct and relatable. "I'm going mildly insane," says the Slipknot guitarist, with a chuckle. But quarantine isn't without its moments. This morning the 48-year-old took delivery of one of the first production versions of the new Fender Jim Root Jazzmaster V4, his fourth Fender signature model, and an instrument that marks two decades of working with the world's biggest guitar brand.

"It blows my mind," says Root when we point out the long association. "I grew up playing Charvels and Jacksons – I never really got into pointy 'metal' guitars. When we did Ozzfest in '99, Fender had DeArmond guitars there. That's how I met [Fender Custom Shop guru] Alex Perez. I asked him, 'Hey, man, can I get Strat with an EMG 81 in the bridge?' Because I love the classics, y'know? Whether it's jean jackets or Ray-Ban sunglasses, to me they're timeless – and it's the same with a Fender Strat or Tele. I said to Alex, 'Man, if I could get you guys to make me a mahogany-bodied maple-necked Strat with either an ebony or maple fretboard, that would be the perfect storm for me."

Root got his EMG-loaded Strat – and soon found that there was something about twisting a golden-era design into a format that worked for his style of music that well and truly struck a chord. The pair continued to work together, eventually revealing the stripped-down Custom Shop Flat Head Telecaster a few years later. It certainly wasn't what Leo had envisioned but then it wasn't what metal fans were used to seeing at the time either – something that Root clearly enjoyed.

"I thought it was cool because no-one expects somebody to play music like Slipknot's on a Telecaster – something you'd see Tom Petty with," he reflects. "I thought that was a cool juxtaposition. At the time, I was like, 'Well, I'm gonna go against this'. It's sort of my anti-metal punk-rock mentality."

CLASSIC VIBES

The chance to work with Fender also stirred up something in Root that took him back to his earliest musical memories. "When I was 10 or 12 years old, before I even started playing, MTV became a thing," he says. "I'd see Deep Purple videos with Ritchie Blackmore playing a Strat, and it freaked me out. Something about that just grabbed me. In my parents' record collection, there were so many album covers with people holding either a Tele or a Strat. I was just drawn to it and it was all downhill from there."

In truth, the guitar got its hooks into Jim even earlier than that, and not even George Lucas was going to stop him from chasing that rock star dream.

OPPOSITE Root says the proportions of a Jazzmaster are a good fit for his 6'6" frame

"I'VE ALWAYS TREATED IT LIKE A HOBBY AND I WANT TO KEEP IT THAT WAY. I WANT TO KEEP THE FUN. I NEVER WANT IT TO FEEL LIKE WORK"

"I knew from a young age that I would take tennis rackets and use them as guitars – and lightsabers," says Root. "My mom has a picture of me on a picnic table with this wooden lightsaber that my grandpa made for me, but instead of playing Star Wars and trying to have sword fights with the neighbourhood kids, I was using the lightsaber as a guitar."

When it came to the real thing, however, Root's formative guitar journey was a stop-start affair – at least at first.

"When I was 14, my parents got me a Memphis guitar, which was like a Les Paul II knock-off with two single-coils in it. The first thing I did was break a string on it," he remembers. "I mainly taught myself by ear until I was about 15. Then this guy came into town that had learnt all the Paul Gilbert stuff out in LA. He was originally from Des Moines and he'd been out there on the Sunset Strip scene with a band but came back to Iowa because it didn't work out. He brought back three-note-per-string scales, modes, and all that stuff."

Before long, the modal evangelist was putting a band together. Impressed with what he'd seen from Root while teaching him the "Paul Gilbert stuff", he asked him to join his thrash act, Atomic Opera.

"There was a big music scene in Des Moines," says Jim. "We'd play the shows, then spend all the money we'd made on recording studios. But we didn't know what to do with the recordings. We'd sell music at our shows and try to make more money to go and record with, but we weren't smart enough to go, 'Hey, maybe we should shop this stuff to a label?' But then, what label is gonna come to Iowa, y'know? It didn't make any sense to us."

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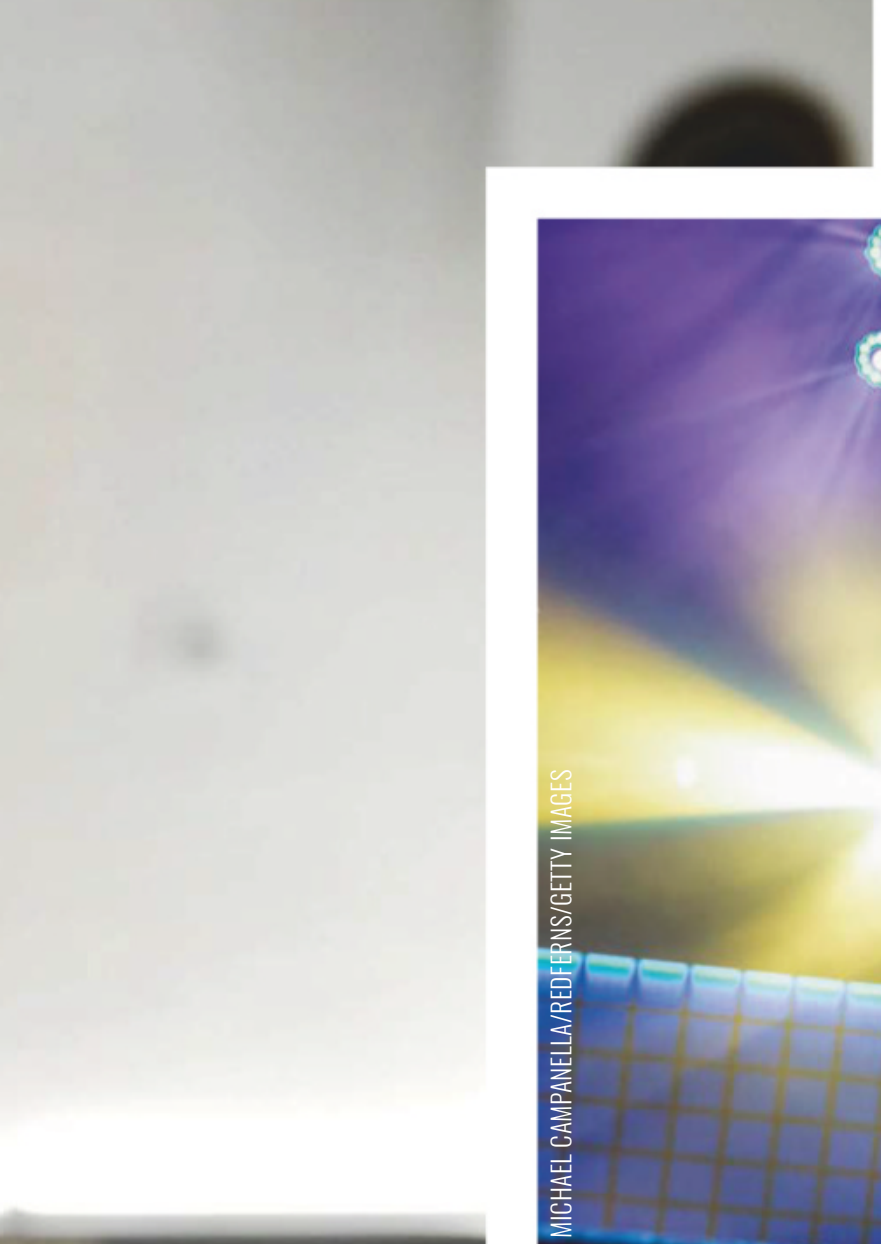
ABOVE A masked Root rocking out onstage in Sweden back in February



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

In about 1993, Root's band fell apart. He spent a few years playing around town, joining Stone Sour with future Slipknot frontman Corey Taylor. Eventually though, he began to drift away from guitar altogether, to such an extent that when fate came calling, he passed. Twice.

"After Atomic Opera ended, Slipknot was kind of kicking off but I'd given up on guitar and the whole rock star dream," says Root. "I hadn't even touched a guitar in years. Slipknot were getting label interest and they asked me to be in the band but I had to pass because I didn't think my abilities were up to the task at that point.

"I said no to joining the band two times. Finally, a friend talked some sense into me. He was like, 'What are you stupid!? You can always go back to what you were doing before! You should give this a try.' So I quit my job. The next day, I was over at Mick [Thomson]'s apartment and he was showing me all the tunes they'd recorded. Then we were rehearsing them at Sid [Wilson]'s house. A week later, I was in Malibu recording them."

Anyone who has seen Root blaze over the past 20 years would probably raise an eyebrow at his assertion that he didn't think he was good enough to cut it in Slipknot. But, as with most players, how good you are is a matter of perspective.

"I like to think of myself as a songwriter more than a guitar player. I don't write lyrics or vocals though, so I'm more of an arranger," says Root. "I try to dip into that technical world. I know all those three-note-per-string scales and stuff like that but I never took it to the Yngwie level. I would learn bits and pieces here and there but it's just not that interesting to me. It's kind of like, 'Hey, check out what I can do on the fretboard…' and that's cool but, for me, it's more about attitude. I like The Eagles and The Who, The Beatles and stuff like that – songs.

"I got to the point where my scales, my picking and my legato got so good that I could play fluidly. But it's only in the past few years that I started learning, 'Oh, you can move these shapes around on the neck to keep things in key'. I've always tried to play for the song but, because I was never moving the shapes around, there's a lot of stuff I'll do that – I suppose if you're really technical guitar player, you could justify how I played it – is not necessarily in key. But I was always like, 'Well, it sounds good to me so fuck it!'

"I'm not the type of guitar player who sits and woodsheds, y'know? I've never been that way. I've always treated it like a hobby and I want to keep it that way. I want to keep the fun and never want it to feel like work. When you're touring, it does feel like work. In the past year, other than recording the album and playing shows, I've never really picked up a guitar. I need to give it a rest for a while so I can rekindle the romance with it."

"I GOT SENT A CUSTOM SHOP CATALOGUE THAT I WAS IN. I WAS LOOKING THROUGH AND IT WAS LIKE, RITCHIE BLACKMORE, DAVID GILMOUR, JIMI HENDRIX... IT SENT A CHILL UP MY SPINE"

TWO'S COMPANY

One guitarist who seems in no hurry to give the guitar a rest is Root's guitar partner in Slipknot, Mick Thomson. The Jackson-toting shredder's style is more overtly technical and studied than Root's and it's this contrast that, over the two decades of Slipknot's existence, has helped the pair forge a symbiotic relationship.

"We're both very individual guitar players," says Jim. "He's definitely a lot more technical than I am at heart. He understands theory and he understands what notes mean and why they're there, all the modes and all that kind of stuff. I could never wrap my brain around that. I'm more of an ear player – a behind-the-beat bluesy kind of guy. I think that works really well with us.

"We try to be diplomatic – so if one of us takes the solo in a song, there's at least something in there for the other to do that makes sense. We're both guitar players, so we're competitive. And we both respect each other's playing styles and all that. But we both want to be able to put ourselves out there too."

Speaking of solos, one of the most striking developments on *We Are Not Your Kind*, Slipknot's sixth and most recent studio album, was the relative absence of them. For a band with two lights-out guitar players, we have to wonder, what gives?

"I think that was a direct result of me focusing on the arrangements and on the songs – I didn't even think about guitar solos," says Root. "It wasn't intentional. It just worked out that way. On the next album, there might be guitar solos on every song!

"Guitar solos are stressful. I love to do them. They're a lot of fun and, of course, you want to showcase your skills. But if the song doesn't need a guitar solo, why put one in there? I always find myself overthinking solos to the point where they don't feel natural. I want to showcase my skills but I also want to play for the song. It makes me fucking crazy!"

JAZZ CLUB

While Jim's signature Telecaster and Stratocaster earned plenty of adoring fans upon their respective releases in 2008 and 2012, it's his radical take on the Jazzmaster, with its mahogany body, twin EMGs and nothing but the barest control necessities, that has really hit home with players since its launch in 2014. Root barely plays anything else these days. But, if not for a moment of happenstance, things could have been very different.

"Alex Perez sent me the first Jazzmaster – a white one with a maple fretboard – but I was reluctant to really play with it," says Root. "It made me think of Dinosaur Jr, Nirvana and stuff like that, and that's not really my vibe. I appreciate those bands – they write great songs, But that's just not really me.

"But then when I was in Stone Sour, we were doing rehearsals and getting ready to record *Audio Secrecy* and I was like, 'You know what, I'm just going to grab that guitar and play it during rehearsals, and maybe it'll give me something different?' When we played the first song, I was immediately blown away by how well balanced it was. I was like, 'Man, regardless of how it looks, this guitar feels so good hanging off my shoulder'. I fell in love almost instantaneously. I feel like I can move around fluidly and my guitar just stays put, you know? Also, I'm 6'6", so the bigger the guitar, the more normal I look on stage!

"I always thought SGs were really big guitars, watching Angus Young play them. Then I bought one online, it arrived at my house and I was like, 'Oh my god, this guitar is tiny!' Angus Young must be very small. They look like jazzboxes on him!"

The success of that guitar, not to mention Jim falling in love with everything offset in the years since, led to discussions about a second version. Several iterations later, and he was determined that his fourth Fender signature model would be something different and more tailored to him than ever.

"I was like, 'Okay if we're gonna do another Jazzmaster, let's really change it up'," says Jim.

"Let's get my new pickups in there, and let's mess with the neck shape and the fingerboard radius. Let's bring more of the traditional Jazzmaster back into it but keep it stripped down in terms of the pickup selector and control knobs. They did some mock-ups and it looked so good and classic with the binding on the fretboard and the big block inlays and a proper Jazzmaster headstock – I thought it was beautiful."

The aforementioned new pickups are Jim's JR Daemonum signature models from EMG, developed from the company's new RetroActive series, which are designed to mix the frequency range of passive pickups with the power of actives. They're a far cry from the EMG 81/60 combo he's used for his entire career – but with good reason.

"The 81/60s are so compressed – and that's good," he exclaims. "Because Slipknot is a wall-of-sound band and there's so many people in it and with so many instruments, you need that so you don't get lost in it. But you know, I never played active pickups until I joined Slipknot, and I missed the way the passive pickup rolls the volume back, and there are certain tonal qualities that passive pickups have that you just can't get from an 81."

COMPANY MAN

Where do you go after you've made the Jazzmaster metal? A look at Root's Instagram page reveals his affection for Fender's left-field Parallel Universe series, in particular the striking new Meteora model. Might that be the next guitar to get the Jim Root treatment?

"I'd love to do a Meteora. They're really cool," he says. "But I feel like I've asked them for a lot already. I might be pushing my luck! Maybe we could even do a Coronado? I'd like to try it with one of those – it might make me approach guitar playing differently."

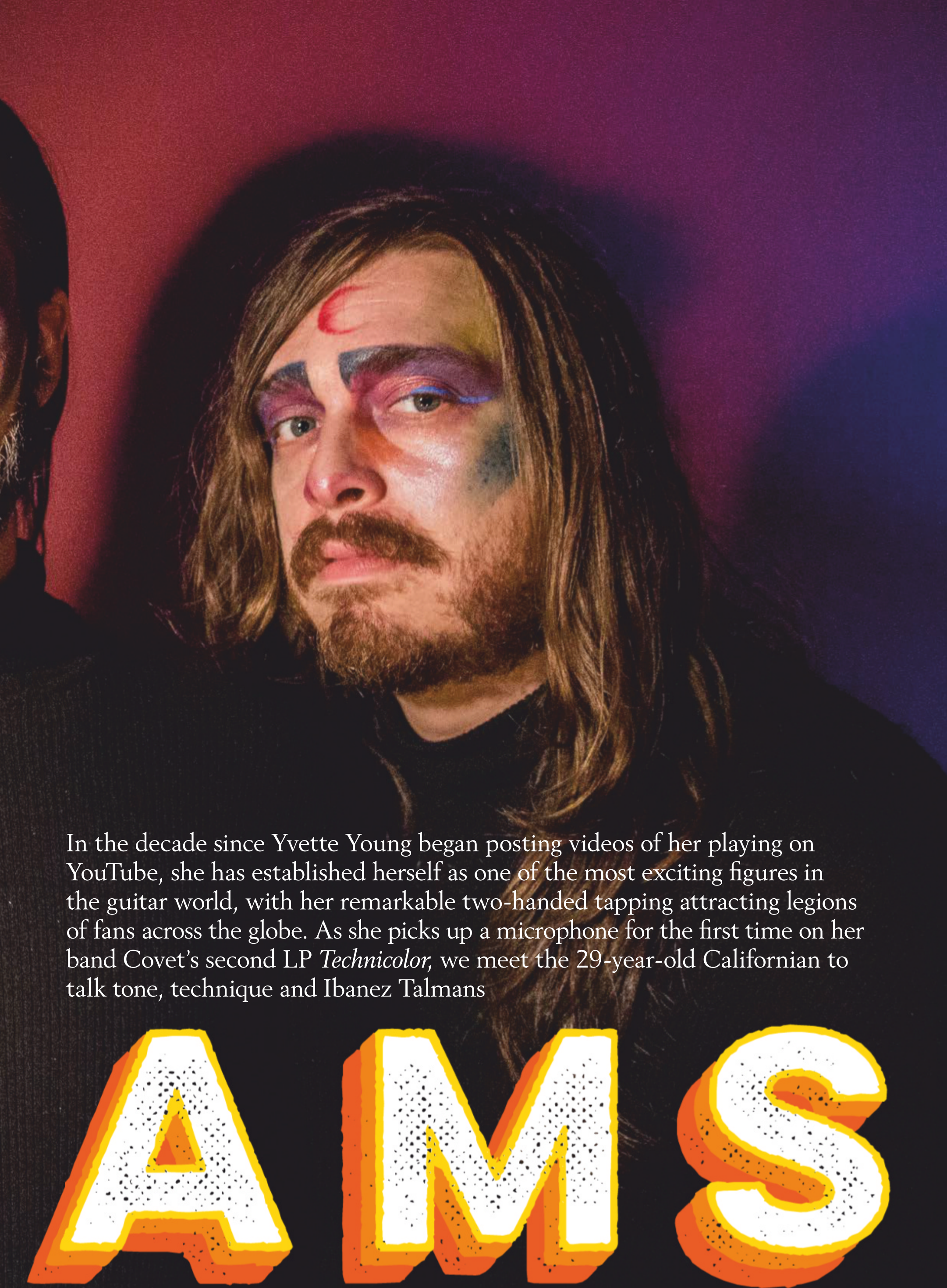
With the mind-melting concept of an EMG-loaded flat-white thinline hollowbody still bouncing around heads, we loop back around to the start of our conversation, and Jim's status as something of an elder statesman of Fender artists. Would the kid who pretty much gave up playing guitar even be able to contemplate that he'd one day be looking over a stable of *four* signature models?

"It blows my mind," Root reiterates. "When we were working on *The Subliminal Verses*, I was with Charvel for a minute, before my signature Tele came out. Fender had just bought Charvel and I think they were trying to push me to use those. "But around that time, I got sent a Custom Shop catalogue that I was in. I was looking through that and it was like, Ritchie Blackmore, David Gilmour, Jimi Hendrix… and it sent a chill up my spine. I was like, 'I can't believe I'm in a magazine from a company that endorses these people!' Talk about that whole *Wayne's World* 'I'm not worthy' thing. These are people I idolised. They were superheroes to me. To be in that company is literally a dream come true. And these are people that my parents loved – you're always trying to impress your parents!" G

For more on the Jim Root Jazzmaster V4, visit fender.com

WORDS GARY WALKER

TECHNICOLOR DRE



In the decade since Yvette Young began posting videos of her playing on YouTube, she has established herself as one of the most exciting figures in the guitar world, with her remarkable two-handed tapping attracting legions of fans across the globe. As she picks up a microphone for the first time on her band Covet's second LP *Technicolor,* we meet the 29-year-old Californian to talk tone, technique and Ibanez Talmans

AMS

For Yvette Young, music is medicine.

But it hasn't always been an easy path. The Californian virtuoso started out with classical piano and violin from the age of four but, by the time she was in high school, the pressure of orchestral life and playing piano competitively had driven her to a dark place – she ended up in hospital after a stress-related breakdown and eating disorder led to a heart problem. But in that bleak moment, Young discovered the guitar. Teaching herself how to play from her hospital bed, she began to develop her remarkable tapping style, while discovering a healthy and positive creative outlet for her talents.

This aspect of her relationship with the guitar came to the fore as Young worked to finish *Technicolor*, the second LP by her math-rock band Covet. Once again, Young was dogged by difficult personal circumstances. Again, the guitar provided a cathartic escape route.

"It was all such a blur and I was going through something difficult at the time," she tells us from her home in the San Francisco Bay Area. "Writing *Technicolor* was difficult because I wasn't in the mindset for it, and was pretty bummed out, but making this album brought me out of it. I wanted to make music that conveyed how I wished I felt, music that was uplifting, optimistic and comforting.

"Everything I put out is charged with emotion because music and emotion are so connected for me. Every time I write any sort of song, I want it to tell a story, paint a mood or a scene. I picked up the guitar when I was really sick in the hospital and it was important for me to have something that I didn't associate with pressure or stress. Even after I left the hospital, the guitar has stayed my primary emotional outlet. That's what keeps me writing music: I'm chasing an emotion or a melody that I hear."

NO PARACHUTE

Watching Young in full flight is a stirring sight, whether she's playing solo online or the driving force behind Covet. It's the latter where you feel her truly take off – her wonderfully musical and deft two-handed tapping style electrifying the band's blend of math-rock, prog and post-rock, as well as all their jazzy flourishes and complex time signatures.

It's remarkable just how much of an emotionally uplifting journey *Technicolor* is given that it's largely an instrumental record. Its capacious and colourful textures ebb and flow right from the first note of opener *Good Morning*, whose glacial reverb-bathed tones teeter on the edge of break-up. Backed by the understated work of bassist David Adamiak, tremolo picking, alternate tunings and complex fingerstyle parts weave mesmerically in and out of drummer Forrest Rice's skittering patterns. Unlike their 2018 debut *Effloresce*, however, *Technicolor* isn't a purely instrumental record. On *Farewell* and the aptly titled *Parachute*, Young takes to vocals for the first time.

"The most marked difference is that there are vocals on two songs – or 2.5, as I do a couple of oohs and ahhs on *Odessa*," says Young, with a laugh. "That's new for us. We've never had vocals before. My whole rule for writing a song is that I don't rule anything out. If a song needs something, I'll do it. I'm a slave to the song.

"I wrote *Parachute* about jumping into the unknown. Sometimes you fall into habits and routines in life and you have to do something to change them, and that's scary. But I was less scared of singing and more excited about it. I was anxious but it was a good kind of anxious."

Finding space for her voice – and allowing the expanded arsenal of effects to shine as instruments in their own right – means Young's intricate playing is at times simplified on *Technicolor*. Riffs and phrases are given more space to hang tantalisingly in the air. Taking pride of place on Young's pedalboard, which also features a new signature Z.Vex Instant Lo-Fi Junky, are an optical compressor and not just one but two chorus pedals.

"We went even further with the effects," she says. "There's very little truly clean guitar tone on the album. A lot of the songs are less 'notey'. There is still a lot of notes but on songs like *Odessa*, for instance, I really wanted melody to be the driving force. Sometimes the effects don't really shine if you're playing too much.

"The heavy hitters on the album included my EarthQuaker Devices Warden optical compressor, which I used a lot to shape my clean tone. There's a sustain knob that you can max out to get yourself to break up more, so that knob was responsible for a lot of the slightly broken-up clean tones.

"The Electronic Audio Experiments Longsword was actually the only gain pedal on the entire record.

> "I WAS REALLY SICK AND IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME TO HAVE SOMETHING THAT I DIDN'T ASSOCIATE WITH PRESSURE OR STRESS. EVEN AFTER I LEFT THE HOSPITAL, THE GUITAR HAS STAYED MY PRIMARY EMOTIONAL OUTLET"

Along with that, I used two choruses: a Somersault Lo-Fi Modulator from Caroline Guitar Company, which is responsible for the really lo-fi fluttery tape-warble sounds, and the Julia from Walrus Audio, which is responsible for the more traditional chorus-style sounds. The main reverb pedal I used was the Mercury Seven from Meris. There's a pitch-down vector and, every time you hear a pitch that plummets, that's the Mercury Seven adding some epicness to the part. It's all over *Nero*.

"I used the EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run, which has that really cool swell feature that delays the attack of your note, and the Carbon Copy Deluxe, which is a nice-sounding analogue delay, whose repeats have a lot of character."

TALMAN SYNDROME

One aspect of Young's arsenal that has remained constant is her enduring love for one of Ibanez's most underappreciated original designs, the Talman. Having started life as a T-style player – a $90 SX Tele clone with Bill Lawrence pickups – Young discovered the vaguely offset double-cut when she began working with Ibanez, ripping the pickups from her original Tele copy and getting them installed in a pink sparkle Prestige model that soon became her hallmark. She would later migrate to a sunburst model sporting three Strat-style Seymour Duncan Five-Two pickups, before finally becoming the proud owner of her own signature version at NAMM 2020: the Slime Green Sparkle YY10.

Young is remarkably just the second female guitarist to get an Ibanez signature, and also just the second artist to have a Talman with their name on the headstock, joining The Offspring guitarist Noodles. But when we ask her about the YY10, the first thing she gushes about are those Seymour Duncan pickups.

"I love those pickups," she says. "My whole spiel about pickups is that you can have a guitar that looks amazing and feels good but, if it doesn't sound great, you won't pick it up because you won't feel inspired. The first time I picked up a guitar with the Five-Two set in, the sunburst Talman, I was so inspired. I wrote so much music on it, they ended up giving it to me. Right out of the box, you can just plug the Talman into the amp with no compression and it plays really smoothly. It's nice and clean but if you dig in it can break up well, and it interacts nicely with my AC10."

"THE REASON I LAY BACK MORE THESE DAYS IS THAT I'M WRITING WITH A BAND AND REALISING THAT IT'S NICE TO LEAVE SPACE FOR OTHER PEOPLE TO FILL OUT THE SOUND"

It's clearly a combo in which Young found inspiration. Other than a fleeting appearance from a custom Ibanez FR Series seven-string on the song *Aries*, the YY10 into her "pride and joy" white Vox AC10 is the sound of the entire record, providing the secret to her trademark edge-of-break-up tone.

"The neck feels really good too," says Young. "It's a Custom Shop neck. The Duncans are really good for clean tones and pedals. I really like the sound when I adjust my tone so that there's just a little bit of break-up, so that it's just on the border of being distorted, but so when I lay back it's clean. It sounds really good with delays too. There's something about that extra bit of gain that gives the repeats so much character, and really emphasises them."

KEEP IT VARIED

While gear plays its part, the root of Young's wonderfully expressive and creative playing style is, by her own admission, a product of her early mastery of other instruments. It's a musical multilingualism that has also helped her circumvent the established conventions of traditional guitar playing.

"I think playing other instruments changes how I think about things harmonically and polyphonically," she explains. "In piano, you have to think about your accompaniment as well as your main line. I think I play the fretboard kind of like I play a piano, in that my left hand and the lower strings are like the accompaniment and my right hand is the lead line.

"With violin, it just made my ear really sensitive to intonation and pitch and muscle memory. You do not know the joys of muscle memory until you've played a fretless instrument! I've never consciously thought, 'I want to escape the rules of the guitar'. For me, guitar is really important because there are a lot of rules in the classical world and pressure to be perfect and to compete. I just wanted to escape that world and have something for myself."

Having something for herself meant starting out as a solo artist and recording pedal demo videos. Young learnt quickly how to fill the spaces in her songs. She admits to being influenced more by composers and songwriters such as Ryuichi Sakamoto and Sufjan Stevens than the traditional go-to guitarists, although she does bear a long-standing admiration for another virtuoso player, Guthrie Govan.

"I never really set out to be 'the tapping girl'," says Young. "It's just something that ended up happening because of the other instrument that I was playing.

When I taught myself tapping, it was like 'Oh you can do this thing', and I started using it a lot because it was easy for me, because of my piano experience. I never used a pick because it felt like a weird extension of my body. It never felt quite right.

"I always had to play by myself, so my challenge was, how do I sound as full as I can as one person? Fingerstyle and tapping helped me achieve that. The reason I lay back more these days is that I'm writing with a band and realising that it's nice to leave space for other people to fill out the sound.

"I developed my style by playing alone but I'm adapting how I play to fit the sound of the band.

Our rule is that we go with whatever best serves the music. You don't want to be stepping on each other. I think it's important for them to write their own parts because I want them to be invested in it."

It's an important distinction. Rather than being a virtuoso guitarist – and now a singer – backed by a pair of willing session musicians, Covet are a real band, and while Young has been using the COVID-19 lockdown to work on acoustic and piano-led songs for her solo project, her focus is firmly on the three-piece. When we reflect on the journey they've taken over the past two years, she's compelled to laugh, almost in disbelief.

"It's insane," she says. "I never thought any of this would happen. I started the band with David to have fun and we jammed in a garage. I never imagined we'd be at a studio, on a label and touring. I never thought I'd quit my job because this takes up so much of my time. It's a privilege. I never lusted after it. It's not something that was my dream but it seems like I was really fortunate to have this opportunity handed to me. When I think about how lucky that is, it makes me want to work really hard. I want to feel like I deserve it."

***Technicolor* is out now on Triple Crown Records**

ABOVE Covet get their heads together (clockwise from top): Forrest Rice, Yvette Young & David Adamiak

EVO 4
48V
1
2

THE GUITARIST'S GUIDE TO HOME RECORDING

WORDS ROBBIE STAMP

Even before lockdown, it was becoming clear that an SM57 on a grille cloth might not be the most practical or best-sounding solution for electric guitar recording in 2020. Thankfully, it's never been easier to capture professional guitar tones at home without waking up the neighbours. Whether you're making your first foray into recording or planning a multi-layered magnum opus, here are 20 pieces of essential advice that should help you get the best results possible, whatever your budget...

GET ON THE SOURCE

Whether you're plugged into a laptop in your bedroom or shredding in the live room of a multi-million-dollar studio, your guitar needs to be the best it can be. Perhaps more importantly, *you* need to be the best you can be too. There's no fixing poor intonation in the mix, and if your jack socket is crackly or your signal intermittent, even recording a scratch demo can turn into a draining experience.

Although limitations can sometimes be inspiring, whatever instrument you plan to use, it shouldn't be an impediment to your creativity. Tune it up, make sure it's acclimatised to room temperature and then tune it up again.

The same goes for every part of your chain, from patch cables and pedals to your interface or amp. The only mistakes you want are the odd bum note, and you don't want a sublime take to be ruined by a noisy signal chain.

WIN AN AUDIENT EVO 4 WORTH £99
TO ENTER VISIT guitar.com/competitions

INTERFACE VALUE

In most cases, a simple audio interface for your laptop, desktop or tablet is the best option for plugging in. The less gear you need, the more budget you'll have for other important stuff, such as monitoring, cabling and, of course, more guitars – you can never have enough guitars. At the bare minimum, you'll want your audio interface to have quarter-inch jack and XLR inputs, with outputs for headphones and monitors. If you're planning on recording vocals or acoustic guitar, 48v phantom power will drastically increase your microphone options too.

If you're planning on getting your electric tones from software amp modelling plug-ins, you may require little more than a pair of headphones and a basic audio interface to get going. Even simple interfaces with two inputs and outputs are pretty powerful and sophisticated these days. For example, the new EVO 4 by Audient (£99, evo.audio) features Smartgain functionality, which automatically and intelligently sets the input levels of your microphones or instruments to avoid clipping or signals that are too quiet. The former causes unwanted distortion if the input signal is too loud, while the latter can cause hiss when the level is boosted to match that of other instruments.

More ambitious budding recordists might want to consider interfaces with dedicated reamping outputs, multiple monitor outputs, more than a couple of line inputs, a range of digital I/O or internal mixer routing. If money's no object, check out the Universal Audio Apollo x16 (£2,747, uaudio.com)

MAXIMISE YOUR MONITORING, LOWER YOUR LATENCY

High-quality monitoring is vital for high-quality recording. For mixing, this means the best monitor speakers and/or headphones you can afford. For recording, it means minimising the delay between what you play and what you hear (latency). More than a few milliseconds will throw your timing and feel unnatural. When recording with amp modelling plug-ins on a computer, the more raw CPU power you have, the better.

External DSP can help take the load off of your CPU, and interfaces such as Universal Audio's Apollo range and Audient's Sono (£419, audient.com) offer amp modelling solutions free from computer-based latency. Another way to minimise potential latency is to get your amp tones from a dedicated modelling unit such as the Strymon Iridium (£399, strymon.net) before the signal reaches your audio interface.

At the higher end, reactive load boxes with speaker emulation tech such as the Universal Audio OX (£1,150) and Boss Waza Tube Amp Expander (£1,143, boss.info) offer a low/zero latency monitoring path and the ability to record your favourite tube amp silently. In many ways, these offer a 'best of both worlds' solution that retains the feel and response of your favourite amp under your fingers but offers the convenience of direct recording.

VOLUME CONTROL

From old favourites such as Palmer speaker simulators (palmer-germany.com) to the aforementioned new wave of impressive multi-function reactive load boxes such as the OX and the Torpedo series from Two Notes (two-notes.com), there are numerous ways to squeeze the roar of your favourite tube amplifier into a line level input without having to field complaints from your disgruntled and newly deaf neighbours.

However, before you cause a disturbance to your wallet, we recommend testing out some digital modelling plug-ins first, to see if you can find the kind of tones you'll be happy with. In addition to dedicated plug-ins such as AmpliTube (ikmultimedia.com) and Guitar Rig (native-instruments.com), we'd encourage Mac users to explore the amp simulations in GarageBand and Logic. Unless you have a huge library of vintage and modern gear at your disposal already, you may find that the additional array of tones and effects offered by modelling plug-ins are a springboard for creativity as you venture into uncharted sonic territory.

If only the hardware route will make you happy, then some sort of speaker simulator is probably the best way forward. But, before you try that, don't discount the humble power attenuator. By using a power attenuator to bring your volume down to an acceptable level, you may still be able to get pleasing results by recording the old-fashioned way, with a microphone. There are many high-quality power attenuators available these days but, if you happen to be handy with a soldering iron, head to *Guitar.com* to find out how to assemble your own for less than £50.

3 TO TRY

HEADPHONES

NEUMANN NDH 20

£419, neumann.com

Everything about these headphones screams 'premium', and their superb sound isolation should prove a boon for domestic recording environments.

AUDIO-TECHNICA ATH-M50X

£119, audio-technica.com

Exceptional clarity, deep bass and robust construction make these pro monitor headphones a sensational choice for tracking and mixing.

SENNHEISER HD 206

£35, sennheiser.com

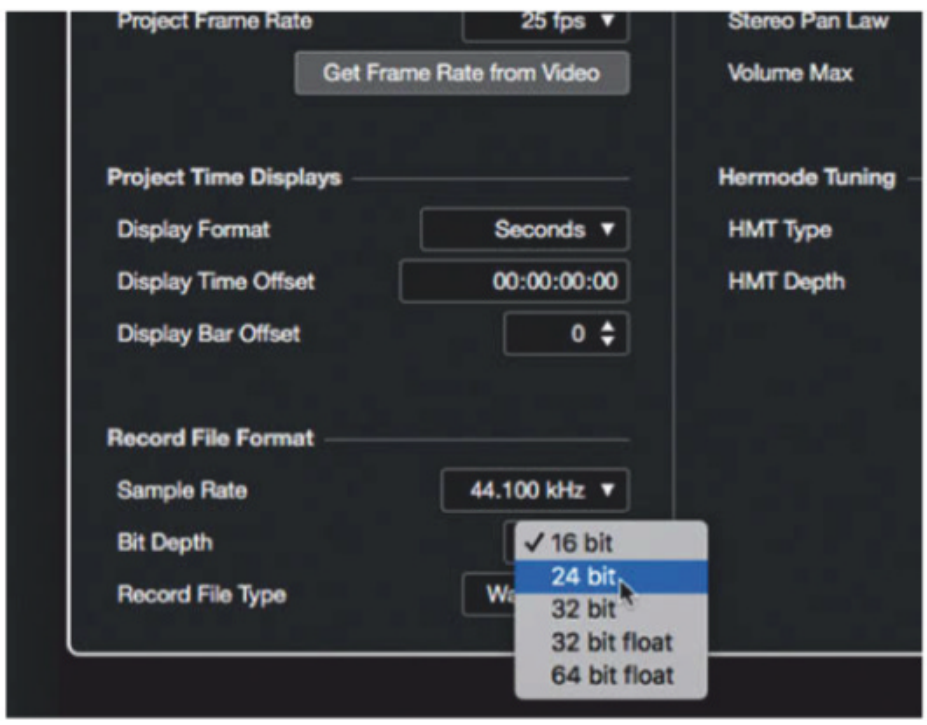
Don't be fooled by the bargain price. These lightweight and comfortable units punch way above their weight, sonically speaking.

BETTER THAN THE REAL THING?

Pro guitarists have been relying on impulse response (IR) speaker simulations for their live front-of-house mixes for years, as well as using them in the studio. Essentially, IRs are able to capture the sonic fingerprints of a mic'd speaker cabinet in a room with a three-dimensional quality that can be indistinguishable from a recording of a physical cabinet.

The advantages are obvious: total recall, consistency in any room/studio, hundreds of models to choose from, multiple virtual mic'ing options, no bleed and, of course, decreased costs and increased portability. The only disadvantages are the lack of that tactile in-the-room experience and the temptation to waste time auditioning hundreds of IRs.

Two Notes' Torpedo Wall Of Sound plug-in is free for the first 30 days and a sensible place to start. Alternatively, modelling stompboxes such as the Strymon Iridium not only come with convincing IR speaker sims onboard but also allow you to load your own third-party IRs via USB, many of which can be found either for free or for a reasonable fee online. Even better than the real thing? Sonically, sometimes. In terms of ease of use and affordability, always.



EVERYBODY HERTZ

Digital audio resolution breaks down into two components: sample rate and bit depth. The CD rate of 44.1kHz (44,100 samples per second) and the common video rate of 48kHz are regarded as the basic sample rates. Higher sample rates – HD audio, if you will – are multiples of these, eg 88.2kHz, 96kHz, 176.4kHz and 192kHz. Despite hot debate on this topic, there are some audible and processing advantages to 88.2kHz and 96kHz. Go any higher, though, and you're straying into snake-oil territory. The higher the sample rate, the more disk space your recordings take up, and for most purposes 44.1kHz and 48kHz are fine. But experiment with higher rates, as equipment/software can behave differently.

With regard to bit depth, or the granularity of each sample, 16-bit is not dissimilar to human hearing but it's best practice to work at 24-bit, as most analogue-to-digital converters operate at this level.

OX
LINE OUT
SPEAKER VOLUME
ROOM
GAIN
Ibanez

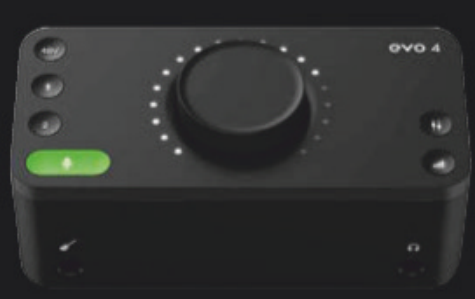
3 TO TRY

COMPUTER AUDIO INTERFACES

UNIVERSAL AUDIO APOLLO TWIN MKII

£699, uaudio.com

Apollo may seem pricey but, with access to market-leading plug-ins and UA's new Luna DAW, it's much more than just an audio interface.



AUDIENT EVO 4

£99, evo.audio

This new kid on the block is perfect for the guitarist seeking an elegant and easy-to-use 2-in/2-out interface with powerful features.

BEHRINGER UM2

£29, behringer.com

For no-frills guitar and vocal recording on a budget, the UM2 offers remarkable bang for your buck and serious sound quality.

KILL YOUR BUZZ

Prior to recording, eliminate as much noise at your source as possible. This includes the induced pickup hum from lighting (especially dimmer switches), mobile phones and computer monitors. Move your guitar around to see which positions and angles are the most and least noisy, and toggle lighting sources to hear which are birthing gremlins.

Hunt ground hum sources from wherever power sources are linked via audio connections. Whether it's your laptop and pedal power supply, or an amp connected to a reamp output, make sure all the power is drawn from the same point, and observe socket fuse ratings (safety first). Toggle ground lift switches on DI boxes, interfaces and pedal power supplies and listen for audible changes. Finally, check that your audio and power cables are kept apart from each other, or at least cross them at right angles to prevent induced hum.

LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD

Aim to record a clean signal, even if the source is pure filth. The interface input level should not clip, and setting it a bit lower beats overdriving the A/D converters – a source of distortion you *don't* want to hear. As guitar DI signals are highly dynamic, set your recording input level so that even your most animated thrashing doesn't clip. Boost pedals may be great at saturating a valve amp input stage but they will crunch your interface buffer in an unholy manner, so proceed with caution. Guitar modelling plug-ins and apps expect a large dynamic range and a relatively low input level, so try to keep your input peak level below -10dBFS. Be aware also that a distorted tone has a lower peak level than a clean one for a similar perceived volume. At each stage, from tracking to mix, keep the peak levels well below clipping to prevent unwanted digital distortions.

RIGHT SIDE OF WRONG

The theory behind gain-staging is simple – run each stage with plenty of headroom before distortion and well above the noise floor – but sometimes you need to hear it go wrong to properly understand it. This means distorting stuff to find where linear responses end. Keep your ears peeled for functional amplifier stages breaking up in a pleasing way as they are overdriven. Juicy distortions can come from DI boxes, mic preamps, external effects units and hi-fi gear. If it has an amplifier stage it can distort, it may well be the sludgy fuzz or ear-melting distortion you need. Even if you don't need it right now, one day it could prove integral to your desired crunch, at which point you'll know precisely where to start. Explore but be sure to protect your ears and monitors while you hoist the gain.

STOMP IT OUT

Pedals can add noise, nibble at your tone, cause faults and conduct power-supply noise and ground hum. There's no need to invite unwanted noise and complication to what should be the shortest possible electrical journey from your pickup(s) to the A/D converter. Keeping your recording signal chain as simple as possible can also prevent you losing creative impetus to endless A/B comparisons between overdrive tones.

On the other hand, pedals are fun and stomping on the wrong button can take your recording in a whole new direction. Less is usually more but, occasionally, more is more. Be aware of where noise enters your chain and take a moment to compare your tone through your pedalboard (with all pedals off) versus going direct into the amp or recording channel; it can be surprising what's lost along that copper road.

TRUST YOUR EARS

It may seem clichéd but it bears repeating. We've all heard stories of how our favourite guitar tones were achieved and, though these can provide essential lessons, it's crucial to be aware of the role of circumstance and chance. Use the experiences of others as starting points or as blockage breakers when you come up short but always prioritise what comes naturally to you and what you feel comfortable with in regard to the recording process. Central to this is trusting your ears, as only you know what *right* sounds like, and the odds are that it will sound right to many others too. So turn that mid knob all the way up, put the reverb before the distortion pedal if you want to, do whatever makes your ears happy. Later on you might change your mind but at least you'll have learnt something instead of simply copying.

LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE

Nobody ever made a great record by waiting until they could afford their dream guitar. There's no point hanging on until you can buy a 1959 Jazzmaster before sitting down to record the next zeitgeist-grabbing indie chart-topper. By the time you do, the zeitgeist will have changed.

Over the years, countless hit records have been made with pawnshop prizes and truly shonky gear. If you have a great idea, record it while it's hot, even if that means doing so with your least favourite guitar or using a fizzy preset in your amp modeller.

Remember: gear is merely a technical means to a creative end. If inspiration strikes, use whatever you have to hand, even if it's not your preferred recording chain. You can always better your original take later once the guitar, pedal, amp or interface you were saving for arrives. Though, in our experience, what's gained in sound quality can often be lost in feeling.

COMPRESS FOR SUCCESS

Whether it's a simple compressor pedal, a plug-in or a weighty rackmount studio classic, it's important to get to know how the compressor you use actually behaves. Compressors can add extra bite to funky chops but they might also render your fat rhythm part thin and lifeless.

If you're unfamiliar with compression, try to use those with the simplest array of controls, and be sure to avoid multi-band compressors until you're confident with single-band varieties (which is most). The more distortion you use, the less difference compression will make. That's because distortion reduces a recording's dynamic range, which is the very food of compression. Unless you've created an unmistakably awesome sound with compression in the recording path (post-pedals), it's best to not commit it to the recording, as you won't be able to uncompress later, once the track has properly come together.

MIX-READY OR NOT?

Who doesn't want to track their guitar part gleaming with EQ, drenched with reverb and pumping with compression? It can make sense to lay your part down as it'll likely sound in the final mix, especially as the boutique effects boom has seen more and more players approach their guitars like a controller, playing the effects as much as the instrument itself.

However, there are pitfalls to this approach. Though it can be fun to play into compression, its dynamic range reduction can subtly alter your timing and phrasing so as to frustrate your efforts during recording. Plus, your epic sound in the tracking process can later be overwhelmed by additional instruments, or take up much-needed mix space.

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

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DECISION TIME

Virtual guitar rigs allow for a near infinite range of tone-shaping choices and adjustability, which can make finishing a track difficult as undecided layer piles onto undecided layer. One can waste mental energy second-guessing how the cool sound you dialled in will perform come the final mixdown, so why not nip this procrastination in the bud early on? Try implementing semi-arbitrary limitations, such as allotting a maximum of five minutes to setting up your amp, bouncing to audio immediately after recording/editing (keeping the DI… or not) and deleting the plug-in settings, or treating the DAW as a tape machine and limiting the track count to 16 or eight. Anything that helps build trust in your ears and instincts can only be a good thing, as it will help hone your creative efficiency and show you how sheer chance can create moments of inspiration.

ROLE OF THE DI

However brilliant your pedal setup or your amp/mic combination, if you can record your vanilla DI signal, then do so. How? Use the spare output from a stompbox tuner such as a Boss TU-3 and route it into your interface in parallel with the effected signal and onto a separate track in your DAW.

It's helpful to have a safety net should part of your rig die during a breathtaking take, while sometimes distorted tones that sound great while tracking cause problems at mixdown due to the loss of punchy transients. Rolling in a cleaner, punchier double with your DI signal running through a different amp or model can save lots of time and stress.

You can also create a new element without having to play the part again, whether by running a darker amp tone through dense reverb or pitching up through fuzz and modulation to highlight a hook in the mix.

3 TO TRY

DAWS

UNIVERSAL AUDIO LUNA

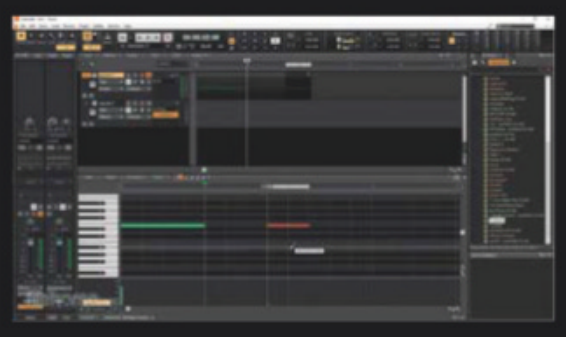
free, uaudio.com

You'll need an Apollo Thunderbolt interface to run UA's new flagship recording system, which includes tape emulation on every channel, latency-free effects processing and a stellar array of plug-ins.

APPLE GARAGEBAND

free, apple.com

Although you'll need a Mac or iOS device to run it, GarageBand shares much of the look and feel of its grown-up sibling Logic, including a vast set of guitar amp and effects models.



BANDLAB

free, bandlab.com

With the ability to create and collaborate across all platforms, this web-browser and app-based DAW is ideal for lockdown or mobile recording, and boasts a variety of guitar amps and effects.

3 TO TRY

DIRECT RECORDING DEVICES

UNIVERSAL AUDIO OX AMP TOP BOX

£1,150, uaudio.com

This game-changing power attenuator, reactive load box, speaker sim and all-round problem-solver really shines in a recording environment and makes it easy to achieve professional tones.

STRYMON IRIDIUM

£399, strymon.net

Simple to use but sonically sophisticated, this pedalboard amp and cab simulator will save on processing power in your DAW by doing the heavy lifting before it hits your audio interface.

LINE 6 POD GO

£399, line6.com

The latest in a long line of modellers from Line 6 has integrated 4x4 24-bit/96kHz USB audio so you don't even need an additional audio interface to record direct with an impressive library of tones.

DEEP COVER

Over the years, everyone from Glen Campbell to Phoebe Bridgers has found the baritone guitar to be a sensational source of inspiration, and there's no doubt that the depth and harmonic interest generated by an instrument tuned to B-B or even lower can enliven even the most mundane chord progressions.

Single-note baritone lines into tremolo and spring reverb sound especially haunting and a good baritone can even double as a regular bass – select the neck pickup and run it through a bass amp model to enhance the low-end. Turn to p90 to read our review of the supremely versatile Rivolta Mondata Baritone VII or check out the Danelectro Vintage '56 baritone (£599, jhs.co.uk) for the full Wrecking Crew experience.

REAMP IT UP

There are few rules for reamping, which is why it rules. Your nominal guitar output level, which amps like to see and pedals like to screw with, is more than 20dB lower than line level. To reamp your guitar DI (or any other audio), it's possible to just drop a line level output by 20-25dB, but this will incur impedance-based frequency and phase problems, however small. If you have an interface loaded with a reamp output, such as the IK Axe I/O (£369, ikmultimedia.com), then you're set, otherwise look at investing in a reamp box such as Radial X-Amp or ProRMP (radialeng.com).

Reamping, whether through effects or actually blowing out of an amp, is particularly rewarding, as you've already done the hard stuff – playing the guitar part. Now you get to tweak pedals in real time and find that dual-overdrive sweet spot.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

While you're in the zone after tracking that once-in-a-lifetime take, why not pop another down safely, knowing that the main part is in the bag? When playing along with the keeper take, recording a double-tracked part can make for less pressured performances. Replicate the initial take and pan the parts hard left and right to add width to a mix and create a space in the centre for solos and vocals.

For a more creative approach, before you record the second pass, try switching pickup settings, tweaking pedals, changing the amp or even switching guitars. Double-tracking (or triple-tracking) in this way can add bite and thickness when tucked behind the main take, while pulling doubled parts in and out of the mix can enhance verses, choruses and middle-eights.

RELAX INTO IT

When your recording environment is relaxed, it's easier to think creatively and act decisively. Positive recording experiences also provide techniques, practical and emotional, to cope with sessions plagued with problems. Before recording, set up a space you feel comfortable in – use mood lighting, burn incense, hang art.

Whatever makes you feel good will come through in the recording. If you're not feeling it, loosen up and have fun. Dial in an OTT sound and splurge a crazy solo over your track, or coax noises from your guitar without playing a note. Invention can flourish when the pressure is off, and pop history is littered with happy accidents.

THE MONEY SHOT

BRIAN RAY'S 1963 GIBSON 'HUMMINGDOVE'

Introduced in 1960, the Hummingbird was Gibson's first square-shouldered dreadnought. It featured a spruce top with a cherry sunburst finish, mahogany back and sides, and that iconic engraved scratchplate design. In 1962-63, a limited number were produced with maple backs and sides, which brought the instrument's specifications closer to those of the Gibson Dove, earning these rare 'birds the nickname 'Hummingdove'.

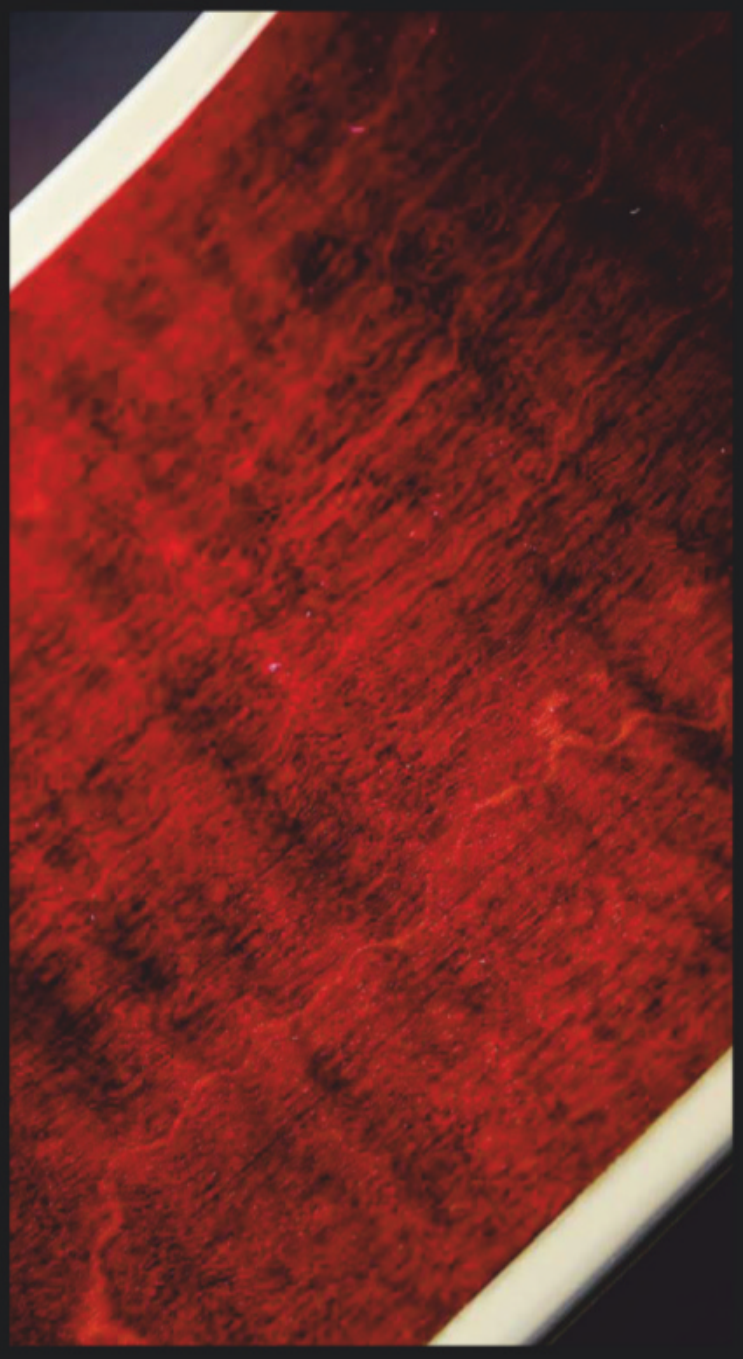
This 1963 example belongs to Paul McCartney/Etta James guitarist Brian Ray, and features a still-vibrant sunburst top and beautiful figuring on the cherry-finished back and sides. "I think 1963 might be my favourite year for Gibson," says Brian. "I like the ceramic saddle they used for the bridge. It sounds rock 'n' roll to me. It sounds like the Stones and The Beatles.

"It just depends what you're looking for. I'm not a Nashville cat, I like these as tools to make rock 'n' roll records. I'm looking for that thing we all remember from those Beatles records. It almost sounds like a cowbell is coming through the speakers, or a hi-hat, but it's the J-160E with absolutely no sustain, just chunkin' away like crazy.

"But this has a huge sound, a lovely sound, not at all choked like a J-160E. Put it in front of a large-diaphragm mic and it sounds giant. I love it to bits."

Follow Brian Ray on Instagram @brianrayguitar

Gibson



Fender

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

1963 FENDER BASS VI

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Is it a guitar? Is it a baritone? Is it a bass? The correct answer is yes, because the Bass VI is all of the above and more. This unquantifiable quality may go some way to explaining why it wasn't a major success for Fender but, in terms of musical instrument design, it would be unwise to measure success in sales figures alone.

You may be unaware of it but the Bass VI has added its subtle magic to countless classic and contemporary recordings. From artful layering in Nashville productions to Cream's psychedelic extemporisations, The Beatles' White Album, the gothic atmospherics of Robert Smith and Robin Guthrie, and Placebo's 1990s indie-rock, the Bass VI has played its part in them all. Sure, it never threatened the Telecaster or Strat in terms of popularity, but the Fender VI, as it was originally known, is still a significant instrument.

Fender wasn't the first company to manufacture a six-string electric bass. Danelectro is usually given that accolade, having introduced a six-string bass/baritone with a 30-inch scale length in 1956. Whether you call one of these instruments a bass or a baritone largely depends on how you tune it.

LEFT This 1963 Bass VI's fretboard is so well preserved that the factory sanding marks are still visible on the clay dot inlays

ABOVE At some point this instrument was fitted with non-standard tuners, but it currently features a set of later double-line Klusons

FACING PAGE The 1963 Bass VI boasts a four-switch plate complete with 'strangle' switch, and a trio of single-coil Jaguar pickups

Duane Eddy tuned his Danelectro an octave below a regular guitar but in the 1950s and 1960s there was a problem that may have prevented the six-string bass from becoming more widely accepted. According to Fender's Freddy Tavares, the string industry at that time wasn't able to produce strings for instruments with a 30-inch scale that sounded as good as those they made for the standard 34-inch bass scale length.

Players struggled with floppy low E strings, and the solution was to tune up a few steps to increase string tension. When a six-string bass is tuned C-C or B-B, it effectively becomes a baritone guitar. Happily, the strings available these days means that instruments such as the Fender Bass VI can be both bass *and* baritone.

The Bass VI was first introduced in 1962, and it bears a strong family resemblance to the Jaguar, which arrived in the Fender catalogue the same year. It has been described as a cross between a Jaguar and a Jazz Bass and it's easy to see why.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £9,995 (inc original blonde hard case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody 6-string bass, made in the USA
BUILD Solid alder body, bolt-on maple neck with Brazilian rosewood veneer fingerboard, 21 frets, clay dot inlays
HARDWARE Offset vibrato, wide 6-saddle bridge, Kluson tuners
ELECTRICS 3x Jaguar-style single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, 3x pickup on/off switches, 'strangle' bass-cut switch
SCALE LENGTH 762mm/30"
NECK WIDTH 39.3mm at nut, 50.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 19.9mm at first fret, 24.4mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 33.9mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.25kg/8.35lb
FINISH Fiesta Red
CONTACT atbguitars.com

You could reasonably conclude that Fender sawed Jazz Bass and Jaguar bodies down the centre line and joined them, with the Jazz half on the bass side and the Jaguar half on the treble. Given what this instrument was designed for, Fender may have been reinforcing the point.

The neck has Fender's usual vintage complement of 21 frets, with a 30-inch scale and regular-sized Klusons. The frets are original and the fretboard is so pristine, the factory sanding marks can still be seen on the clay dots.

IF FENDER'S INTENTION WAS TO CREATE AN INSTRUMENT THAT BLURRED THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN A BASS, BARITONE AND SIX-STRING GUITAR, THEN THE BASS VI WAS A STUNNING SUCCESS

FACING PAGE This instrument comes complete with its rare original blonde hard case

At some point our Bass VI was fitted with non-standard tuners, and now has a set of later double-line Klusons. Filled screw holes are just visible, along with some damage to the face of the Fiesta Red headstock from when the bushings were removed.

First-year Bass VIs had Strat-style pickups set in metal surrounds and a Jaguar-style three-switch plate – on/off for each pickup. By the time this example was made in early 1963, the Bass VI was fitted with a trio of Jaguar pickups, complete with Magnetic Field Accumulator claws, plus a four-switch plate with a Jaguar-style low-cut 'strangle' switch, and a pop-up string mute. The neck pickup on this instrument has also been rewound.

The mute and strangle switch may seem unusual these days but they made sense at the time. Six-string Danelectros were often used by Nashville and LA producers to add punch and clarity to both electric and upright basslines. Played palm-muted with a trebly sound, it was referred to as 'tic-tac' bass, and Fender's new-for-'63 features put that Nashville sound at players' fingertips.

The vibrato system is also the same as that of a Jaguar but, look closely at the Bass VI's bridge, and you'll see it's a bit wider to provide more room for

adjusting intonation. This additional width was pretty wise considering the sheer variety of string gauges that can be used on this instrument.

Our Fiesta Red example's neck has virtually no playwear and the fretboard looks almost factory fresh. The green nitrate scratchplate has shrunk ever so slightly but it's in otherwise perfect condition and all the hardware is exceptionally well preserved. The guitar even comes with its original whammy bar and rare blonde Fender case.

The Fiesta Red paintwork is in fine shape but has suffered a few bumps and bruises across the years. Any damage is mostly confined to the edges and the back, and although a previous owner has carefully touched up the worst bits – most likely with nail varnish – the colour match isn't actually too bad.

IN USE

The neck profile and narrow nut width most closely resemble a Jazz Bass and it makes the transition from guitar to bass utterly seamless. Although the strings are fatter, the spacing is far from cramped and it's extremely easy and comfortable to play.

FACING PAGE The six-saddle bridge has increased width for adjusting intonation, which is handy given the range of string gauge options

If Fender's intention was to create an instrument that blurred the boundaries between a bass, baritone and six-string guitar, then the Bass VI is a stunning success. You can capo it and play rhythm, and it's so easy to pick out chords all over the neck, it almost comes as a shock when you revert to the low strings and remember you're actually playing a bass.

The bass tones are very much in the Fender tradition and the middle pickup is the go-to selection. But, of course, all the combinations work well and the tonal range is so wide that it makes honing a sound to sit in a track far easier than usual.

Where the mechanical mute on Jaguars is often overlooked, we'd replace the degraded foam on this Bass VI to make use of it. Using the Bass VI while recording, we get a classic woody and growly thud by stuffing some foam under the strings. Even with that in place, the Bass VI's sustain is hard to suppress.

This instrument is a revelation and, if we owned a Bass VI, we suspect it would be used regularly. It's versatile, easy to play and inspiring. Unfortunately, our funds won't quite stretch to this custom-colour example but, with everything from Custom Shop to Squier reissues out there, we may well be adding the Bass VI to our Reverb search list!

SOUND AND VISION

From punk bassist to P-90 advocate, this British commercial and editorial portrait photographer has assembled an enviable selection of vintage instruments along the way

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY PHIL BOURNE

Over the years, we've featured just about every type of guitar collection imaginable, from multi-million-dollar rock star arsenals to collections that focus primarily on one specific model or even one custom colour. Don't believe us? There really is someone out there who only owns Fiesta Red Strats. Dozens of them.

Maybe it's because the pursuit of clutter-free minimalism has become so popular in recent years but there's something especially appealing about the notion of curating a small but discerning collection of vintage guitars. Just four or five instruments, perhaps, that tick all the boxes sonically and represent some of the very best examples of their type.

Almost by accident, London-based photographer Phil Bourne has arrived at precisely that point. But, like most guitarists, he's been on a long journey to get there, including a stint as a bass player in the punk era, selling guitars to fund photography gear, and plenty more besides. But before we get into all that, let's wind back the clock to Phil's childhood in the North West of England and find out how his obsession took hold.

"The first time that I ever really thought about playing guitar was when I was about nine years old. I had a schoolmate whose parents had a lot of Beatles records. I would go around to his house and we'd play The Beatles and jump around while using tennis rackets as guitars. The song that sticks in my mind as the one that me want to get a guitar and to be in a band is *Come Together*. So that was probably when the seed was planted. Shortly after that, I discovered T. Rex and was just completely blown away. After hearing *Jeepster* for the first time, I knew that I had to get a guitar as soon as possible. That was an exciting sound."

What was your first guitar and what was your first 'proper' guitar?

"The first guitar I had was a cheap Spanish guitar, a Kapok. I got it as a Christmas present. I kept the nylon strings on it for a while but then changed them for steel strings. The action on it was about an inch high! I did manage to learn how to play an E, an A and a D chord on it though, as well as a few basic riffs. I ended up painting it with white emulsion to make it look less like a Spanish guitar.

An Exaltation of Larks
James Lipton
British Folklore, Myths and Legends
Mary Alexander
Samuel Johnson and His World
THE ENGLISH YEAR
Strong & Orman
THE ETRUSCANS
Fender

“I JUST LOVE THESE – THE LOOK, THE FEEL, THE SOUND. PLAY THEM CLEAN AND YOU CAN GET TWANGY COUNTRY TONES, CRANK THEM UP AND THINGS REALLY START TO GET INTERESTING”

Phil’s love affair with the Les Paul TV Special began when he clapped eyes on a photo of his hero Marc Bolan playing one. He recently acquired this stellar 1956 example

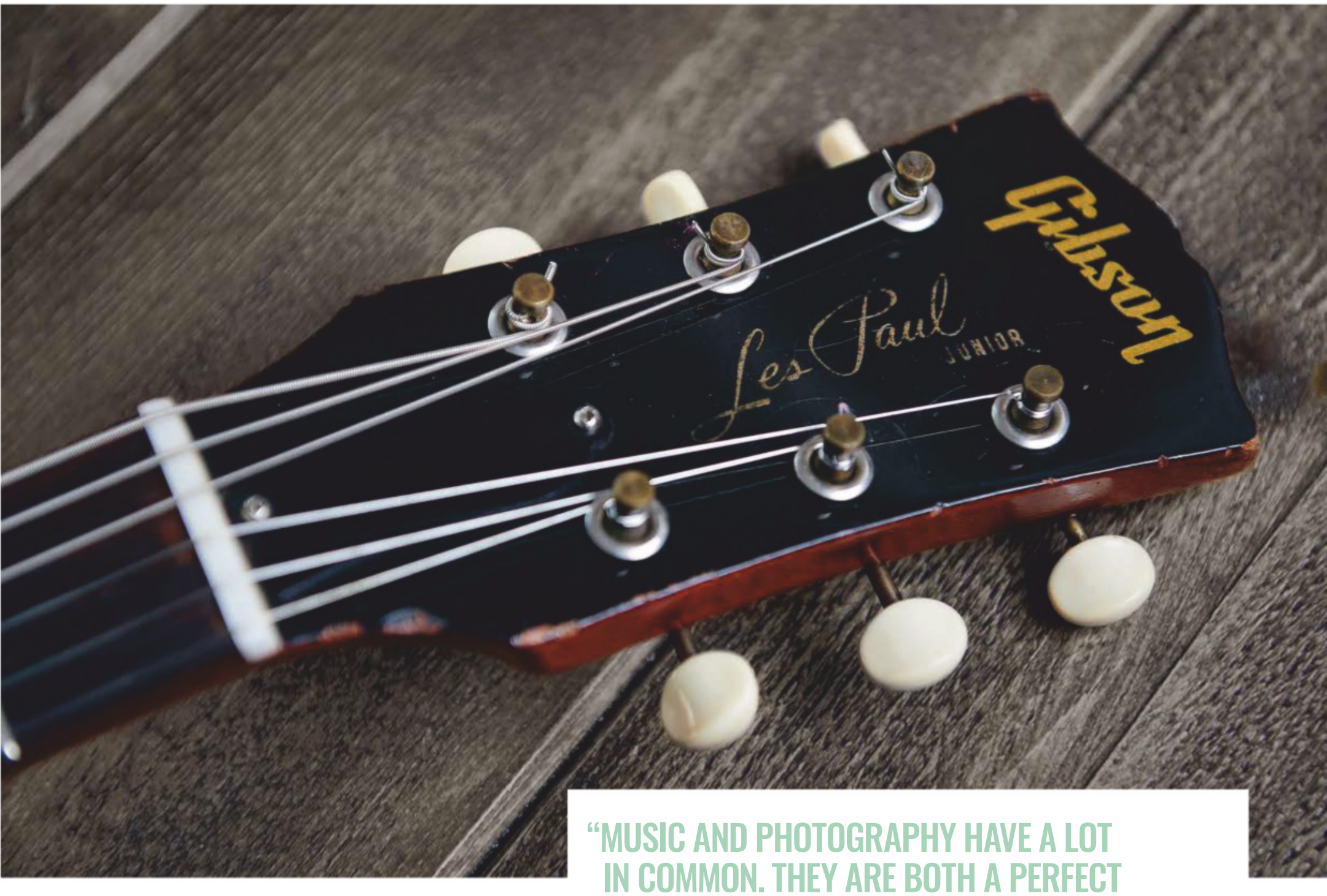
“I was going to form a band with a couple of schoolmates, and their parents bought them both six-string electrics. I still had my acoustic. I knew how to play more chords and riffs than them but a band with three guitars was unheard of in our small world so I opted to get an electric bass – a Columbus Jazz Bass – instead. At the time, I was a big Slade fan and was struck by Jim Lea’s basslines, so that sold me on the idea of playing bass. Ironically, that first attempt at getting a band going never got off the ground but I continued playing bass as my main instrument in a number of other bands for the next five years or so.

“My first ‘proper’ guitar, then, was actually a bass – an Olympic White 1966 Fender Mustang. After that, I got a burgundy ’74 Rickenbacker 4001, which I used in my first professional gigs with The Drones and then The Colours Out Of Time. After that, I switched back to guitar, swapping the Ricky 4001 for a ’69 black Gretsch Roc Jet.”

Did you ever feel like music could be a career or was photography always a more viable option?

“Playing music for a living was always the thing that I really wanted to do more than anything else. I was a professional musician for a few years until I had to go and get a ‘proper’ job.

Les Paul
SPECIAL
Gibson



"MUSIC AND PHOTOGRAPHY HAVE A LOT IN COMMON. THEY ARE BOTH A PERFECT MARRIAGE BETWEEN ART AND TECHNOLOGY, AND BOTH CAN BE QUITE TRANSCENDENTAL"

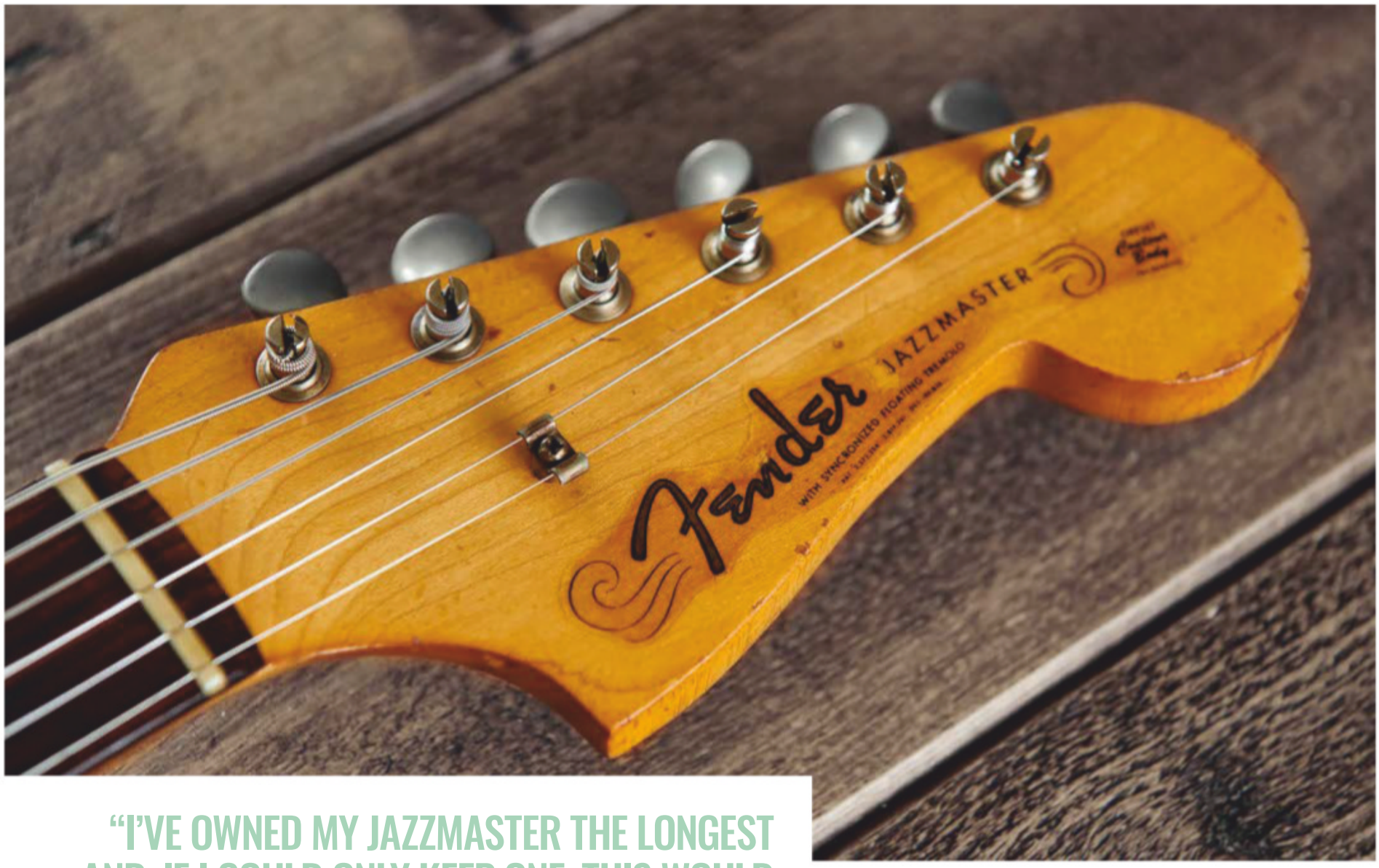
Phil says this 1963 Gibson Les Paul/SG Junior is "the most acoustically resonant solidbody" he's ever owned

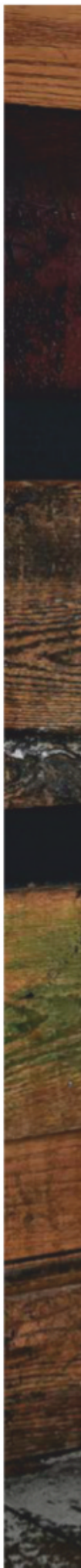
"Being a 'professional' back then consisted of signing on the dole while rehearsing, gigging and recording. When I was 17, I moved to Manchester and joined The Drones – who, along with The Buzzcocks and Slaughter & The Dogs, were one of the original Manchester punk bands – to replace their original bass player who had just left. The rest of the band were a bit older and more experienced than me, so I learnt a lot quickly. We played at The Factory, The Marquee Club, The Music Machine, and The Moonlight Club, and toured with Sham 69. It was quite an experience for a 17-year-old.

"After that I played briefly in a band called The Pits before joining The Colours Out Of Time. The Colours would release two independent singles, record a Peel session and play a residency at Julian Cope's Club Zoo with The Teardrop Explodes. Despite being hotly tipped by both the *NME* and *Melody Maker*, The Colours failed to progress and broke up. It was partly due to lack of management and partly due to an aloof provincial arrogance. I then moved to London with the intent of getting another band together – at that point I'd switched back to guitar and started writing songs on my own – but soon discovered that I had to get a 'proper' job just to survive. Living in London cost more than living in the North West.

"After a couple of jobs, I ended up in magazine publishing. I got seriously into vintage guitars after getting a copy of Tom Wheeler's *American Guitars* book. My day jobs sometimes afforded me the means to buy a nice 'old' guitar.

"I first got into photography when I was in The Colours. I was shooting black and white film but never considered it a possible profession until much later. It wasn't until I found myself out of the magazine publishing business and bought a DSLR that the photography bug bit again.





"I'VE OWNED MY JAZZMASTER THE LONGEST AND, IF I COULD ONLY KEEP ONE, THIS WOULD BE IT. IT HAS A LOT OF SENTIMENTAL VALUE"

Phil's pride and joy is this 1960 Fender Jazzmaster in Daphne Blue, discovered through sheer luck in a London vintage shop. As evidenced by the wear on the rear of the body, it has earned its retirement from live shows

"At that point, I decided to put all my efforts into making a new career out of that and to see how far I could take it. I was inspired by the possibilities of digital photography coupled with the power of visual storytelling."

What parallels do you see between music and photography?

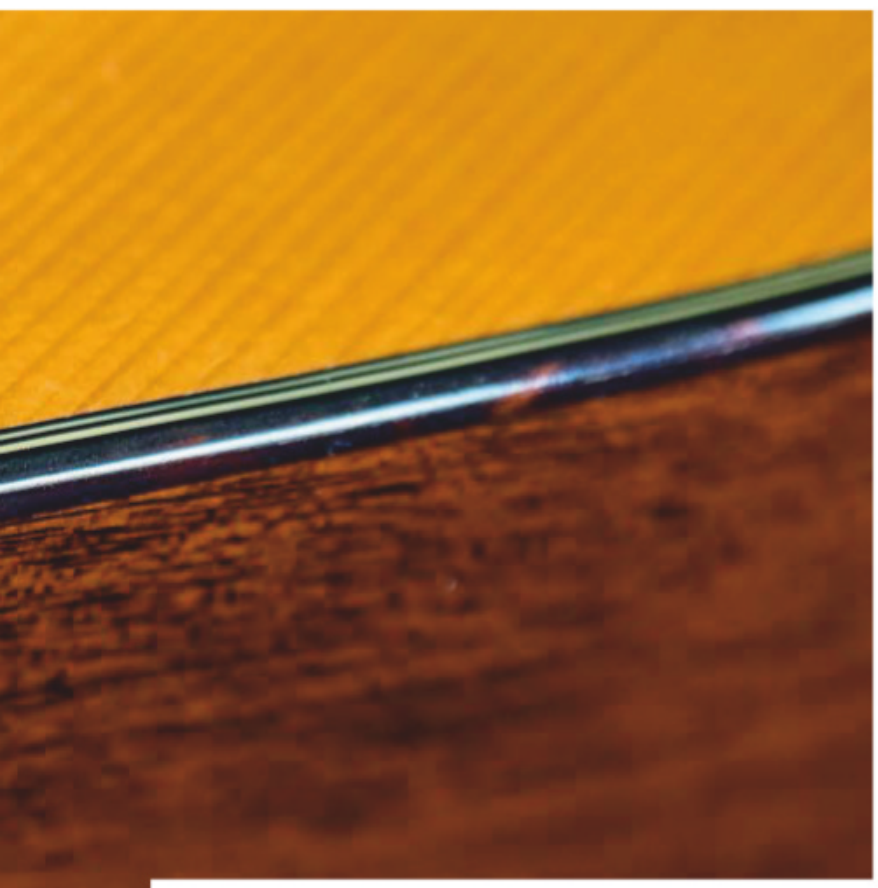
"I think music and photography have a lot in common. They are both a perfect marriage between art and technology, both are means of expressing how we see and feel life and the world, and both can be quite transcendental.

"When I decided to pursue photography as a profession, the first things I shot were live shows. I managed to get in with one of the London picture agencies and started shooting all kinds of gigs, from up-and-coming bands at venues like The Barfly to stadium acts such as Coldplay, Foo Fighters and REM, plus plenty in between. Being a musician definitely helped when it came to timing and anticipating the decisive moments in a live performance. From there, I started doing promo shoots with bands, both longer pre-planned shoots and quick backstage portraits. Again, being a musician helped, especially in terms of communication. I could speak their language and have empathy and understanding. Occasionally, I would get into long conversations about gear with fellow guitar geeks."

How did you arrive at the guitar collection you have today and is there a story behind each of the instruments?

"I've trimmed down my vintage collection over the past decade, mainly to fund photography gear. Though I will no doubt be adding to it again. One can never have enough guitars, right? Especially vintage ones.

"My present vintage guitars include a 1960 Fender Jazzmaster in Daphne Blue, a '63 Gibson Les Paul/SG Junior, a '53 Martin 000-18 and, my most recent acquisition, a '56 Gibson Les Paul TV Special. All of these are keepers. My other guitars are reissues: a '62 Strat reissue and a 2019 Les Paul TV Special – the two I gig with – as well as an early 1980s Tokai Love Rock, and a '62 reissue P-Bass. I recently sold a Les Paul R8. I've let a few vintage guitars go that I didn't get on with, including a '65 Gibson SG Special, a '64 Gibson Firebird III and a '66 Fender Electric XII. The Firebird looked cool but was too top heavy and the Electric XII I hardly played, so away they went.



"THE '53 MARTIN IS ONE OF THE SWEETEST ACOUSTICS I'VE EVER HEARD. IT MAKES ME SMILE FROM EAR TO EAR"

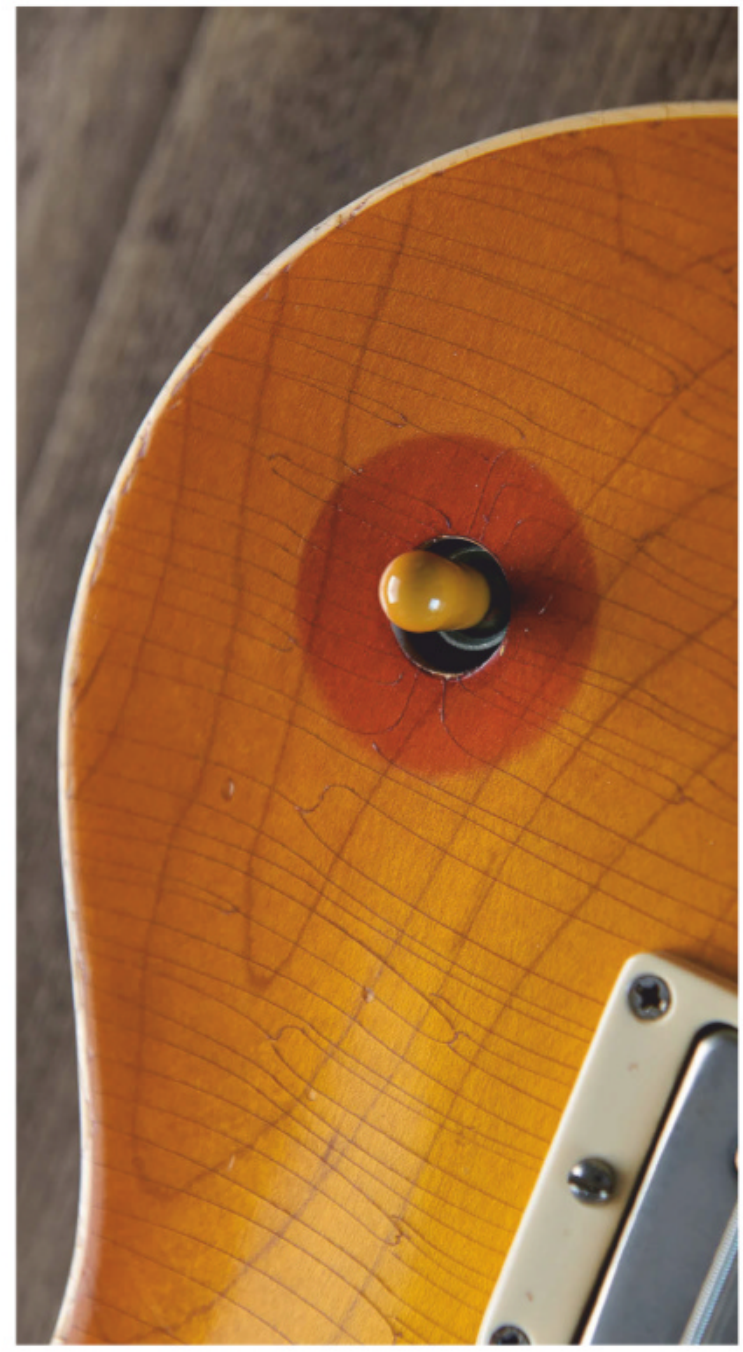
The SG Special I sold to fund some photography gear. I decided to keep the '63 Junior instead.

"I've owned my Jazzmaster the longest and, if I could only keep one, this would be it. It has a lot of sentimental value. I've used it at loads of gigs and on a lot of studio recordings, though it is now 'retired', at least as far as live action is concerned. Just before I got the Jazzmaster, I had a '62 Gretsch Country Gentleman, which got stolen. Luckily it was insured; I bought the Jazzmaster with the money.

"There was a bit of serendipity about how I came across this one. I'd been wanting a Jazzmaster for some time – Tom Verlaine was a big influence on me – and I had this vision of a Daphne Blue Jazzmaster. I thought it would be really cool I could find one. I naively had no idea how rare they were. So when the insurance money from the Gretsch arrived, I went straight down to Vintage And Rare Guitars, then in Earls Court. This was long before websites existed, so I had no idea what they had in stock. As I went downstairs, I spotted a Daphne Blue Jazzmaster in the corner and knew right away that it was the one. I played it for a while anyway but I'd already made my mind up."

"The 1953 Martin 000-18 is one of the sweetest-sounding acoustics I've ever heard. When I was trying this one out, I compared it to both a 60s and a 70s 000-28. Both are great guitars in their own right but the '53 just blew them out of the water. There wasn't just a bit of a difference in tone, there was a huge difference. It was an eye-opener. The '53 was much louder but the tone was much more focused and the harmonics just rolled off it effortlessly. It makes me smile from ear to ear whenever I play it.

Phil says this 1953 Martin 000-18 boasts a much better tone than 1960s and 70s examples he auditioned



Despite its killer looks, Phil recently parted ways with this Gibson Custom R8

"The most acoustically resonant solidbody I've owned is the '63 Les Paul/SG Junior. It's a lively guitar. The dogear P-90 sounds fat and aggressive but also retains a clarity, which a lot of the modern P-90s I've heard don't seem to have. It's got a tapered neck, which I believe is common on '63s. It's quite slim, almost like a '60 at the nut end before venturing into '59 territory around the fifth fret and then going into a full '57-'58 type profile from the 12th onwards."

What about your latest acquisition, the 1956 TV Special?

"I've been interested in Les Paul TV Specials from a very young age, when I first saw a picture of Marc Bolan playing one, and Johnny Thunders with one on the cover of *Too Much Too Soon*. A few have eluded me over the years – they were snapped up before I had the chance to get the cash together – but I was fortunate enough to acquire an original '56 Special recently.

"I just love these guitars – the look, the feel, the sound, everything. They're extremely versatile. Play them clean and you can get twangy country tones, like a fat Tele on the bridge pickup, or chiming jangle in the middle position, or mellow jazzy tones on the neck pickup. Crank them up a bit and things really start to get interesting. They can give you everything from growling punky rhythms to screaming leads to the classic Les Paul 'woman' tone. They have it all"

Is there one that got away?

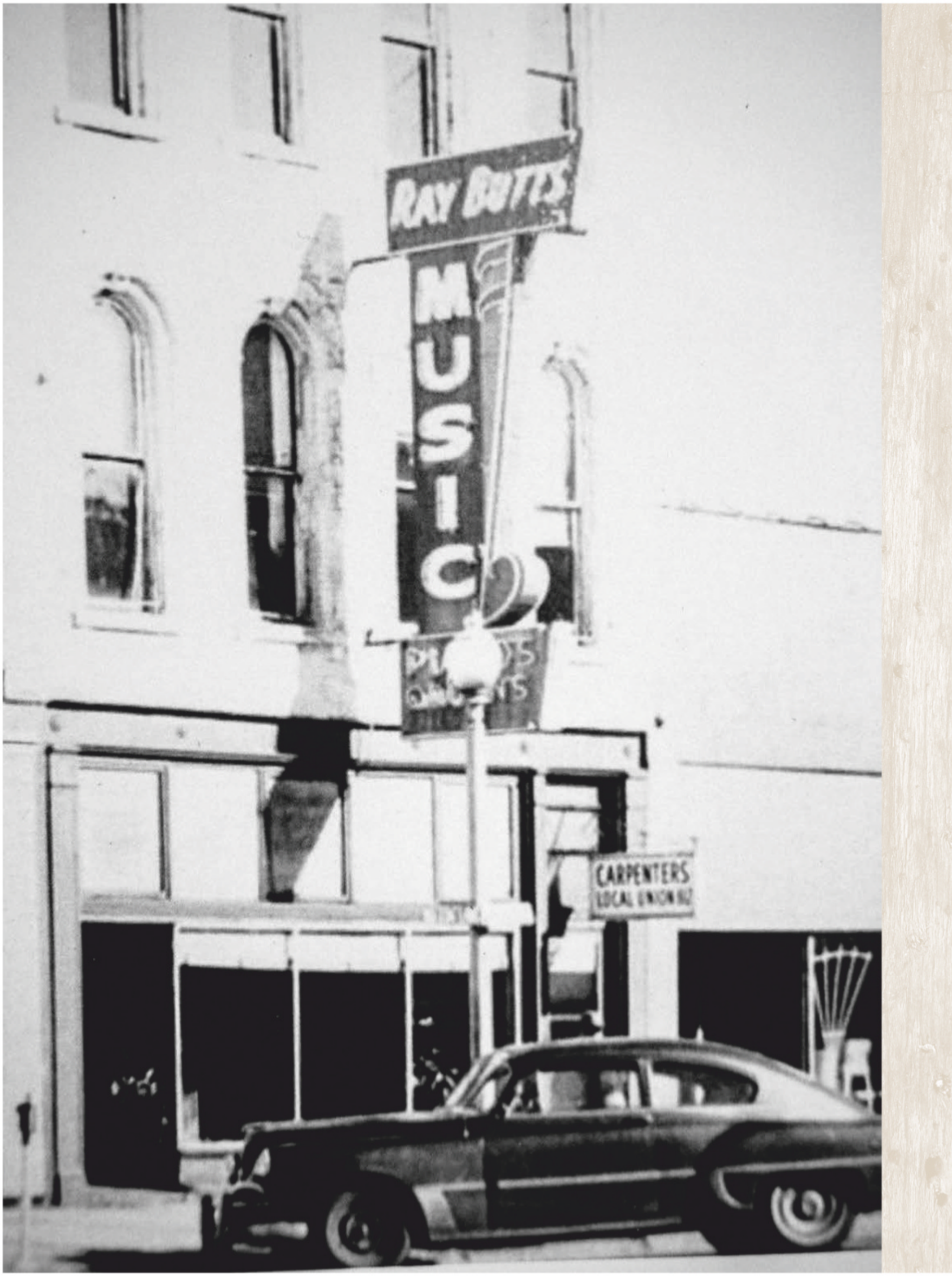
"There are two. The '62 Country Gentleman was the same spec as George Harrison's famous one – stairstep Grovers, double flip-up mutes and two Filter'Trons. I had it for a year and then it got stolen, never to be seen again. The other was a mint 1964 Epiphone Casino, the same year and spec as John Lennon's. I literally only had it for three days. I bought it from a well-known dealer and, unbeknown to them and to me, it had recently been stolen. I had to hand that one back but the dealer let me pick a '64 Firebird III, which was the same value. The Casino was reunited with it's true owner. It was the cleanest example I'd ever seen. C'est la vie."

Is there anything you're planning on adding to your collection?

"I'm really into Les Paul Juniors and Specials now. It's taken me a long time to discover the greatness of a P-90 on a slab of mahogany. So a double-cutaway Special and a single and double cutaway Junior would be top of my wishlist."

Find out more at philbourne.com

The Lives of the
KINGS & QUEENS
OF ENGLAND


RAY BUTTS
MUSIC
CARPENTERS
LOCAL UNION 162

WORDS MATT BLADES

BEYOND THE FILTER'TRON

THOUGH RAY BUTTS IS PROBABLY BEST KNOWN FOR INVENTING THE FILTER'TRON, HIS ECHOSONIC AMPLIFIER HAD A SEISMIC IMPACT ON 1950S POP MUSIC – AND THE INNOVATIONS DIDN'T END THERE

Over the past couple of issues, we've seen how the documents and parts in the Ray Butts archive have provided fascinating insights into his career. In addition to inventing the Filter'Tron – possibly the earliest humbucking pickup designed for the electric guitar – Ray could also claim to be the inventor of the first guitar amplifier with a built-in echo effect. Though fewer than 70 units were built, the EchoSonic's slapback sound would become iconic.

In the early 1950s, Ray was running his music shop with his wife Ann, in Cairo, Illinois. Local guitarist Bill Gwaltney explained to Ray how he was eager to recreate live the slapback tape-delay sound on Les Paul's recordings. At the time, those echo effects could only be achieved in the studio. Ray set about to change that.

At first he experimented with an old Gibson amp and a wire recorder but, by 1953, he'd built the first of his EchoSonic amps, using an onboard tape loop to produce the desired echo effect. It captured the slapback sound perfectly and, while Bill took it out to play gigs, Ray set about making EchoSonic #2.

He figured that selling what we might now call a 'boutique' amp for $495 to smalltown musicians would be tough, so he went to Nashville, got in touch with Chet Atkins and showed Chet the amp. Atkins played it that night on the Grand Ole Opry. Impressed, he put in an order.

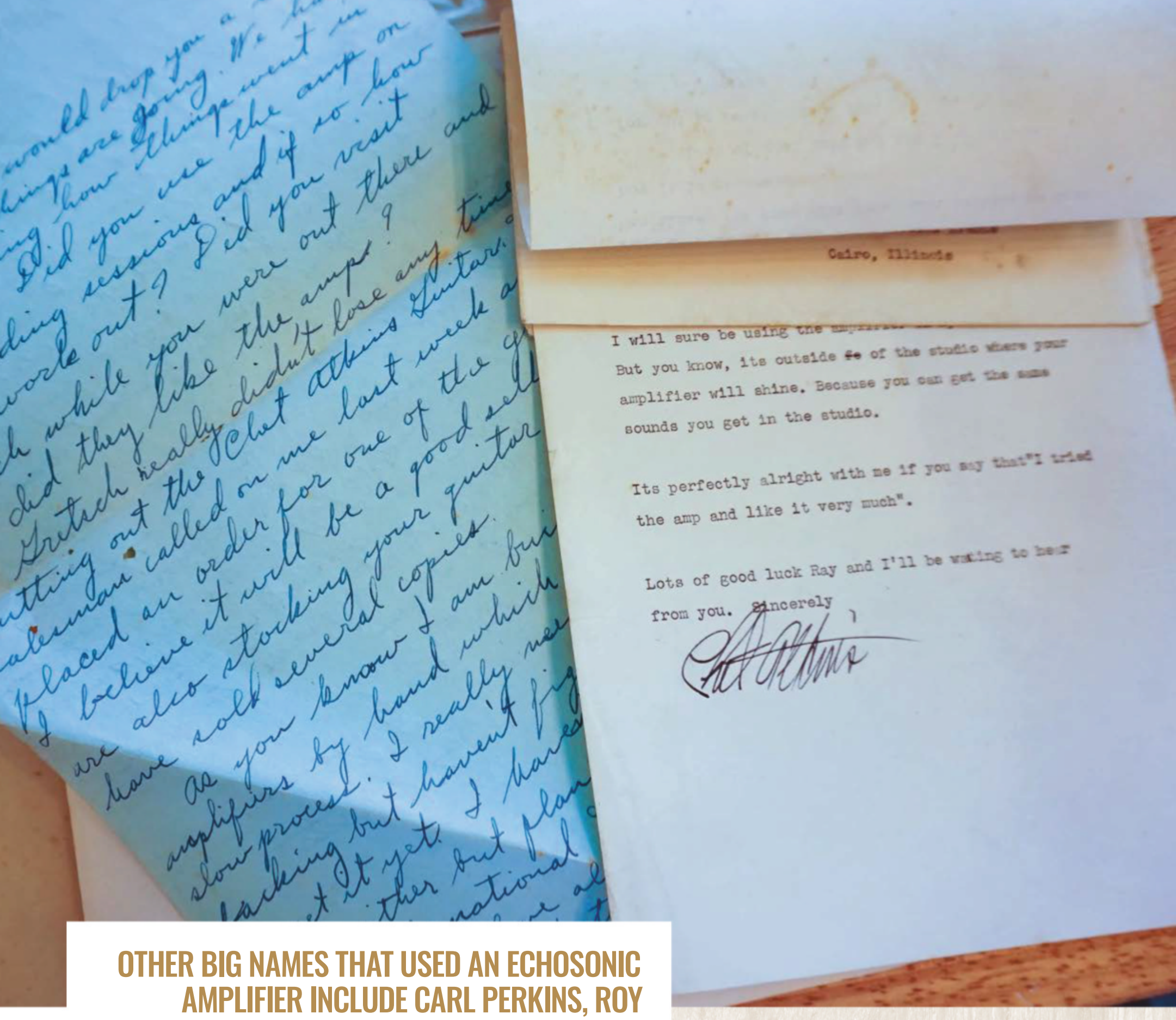
Letters between Atkins and Butts throughout 1954 show the appreciation that the guitarist had for the unique amplifier – and how keen he was to have his own as soon as possible. In a letter from May '54, Atkins writes that he will definitely be using the amp on his records but that its real benefit will be when playing live, "because you can get the same sounds you get in the studio".

Ray was meticulously building the amps on his own, one at a time. Clearly they took a while to complete, as Atkins checks in with another letter in June, writing, "I was hopin' that you would have come strollin' in with the amplifier by now".

Chet didn't have to wait too long. In August, Ray sent a letter asking how the guitarist was enjoying the EchoSonic and if he'd used it on his recording sessions in New York, and enquiring whether other musicians had given their opinion on the product.

With Chet Atkins playing the amp at shows and sessions, it wasn't long before more people got in touch with Ray to find out how they could get an EchoSonic of their own. He only built 68 in total but the list of influential musicians that owned and played them is impressive, featuring many of the world's biggest names in guitar at the time.

Among those was Scotty Moore, who, after hearing a Chet Atkins recording, got in contact with Ray and purchased EchoSonic #8 in May 1955. He later added a pair of satellite amps that Ray built for him.



OTHER BIG NAMES THAT USED AN ECHOSONIC AMPLIFIER INCLUDE CARL PERKINS, ROY ORBISON, LUTHER PERKINS AND PAUL YANDELL

ABOVE Letters between Butts and Chet Atkins provide interesting insights into their working relationship

These duly bumped up the volume live. The Butts archive includes a cheque from 1957, signed by Vernon Presley, which was likely payment for the additional amps.

Other big names that used an EchoSonic include Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Luther Perkins and Paul Yandell. Yandell's amplifier was later purchased by Scotty Moore in the 1980s. These days it resides with Deke Dickerson.

With his amp being seen and heard on some of the biggest hits and grandest stages of the day, it was no wonder that demand for the EchoSonic grew beyond a level that Ray Butts could reasonably fulfil. His papers in the mid-1950s are replete with letters from people stating how much they love the amp, and wondering if they can get one for themselves.

The supply/demand problem was apparent to Ray as early as August 1954. In his letter to Atkins, Butts expressed concern at how slow the process moved, and that he was looking for some kind of financial backing or partnership. Among other possible solutions, Butts asked Atkins if he could show the amp to Gretsch, and ask if they might be interested in becoming a dealer or distributor of some sort.

Further down the line this partnership was indeed considered, with Gretsch looking into producing the amp, but it never came to fruition. Butts also sent an amp to Rickenbacker and was disappointed with their initial response, though they later agreed a deal to produce a model based on his design: the Eko-Sound. Beyond this, the EchoSonic was also the basis for the Echoplex, another transformative piece of gear.

THE PERFECT PICKUP

After inventing the Filter'Tron, Ray didn't rest on his laurels. For the rest of his life, he ceaselessly looked to innovate and improve on his own designs and those of others. In his first correspondence with Gretsch regarding the pickup in 1955, Ray reveals he already had two designs for the Filter'Tron: one more efficient and the other less expensive to produce.

He also lists the tonal inadequacies of DeArmond pickups and details how these issues are corrected with his design, writing that Chet Atkins says they're the best he's ever heard.

Assisting the guitarist with recording and building his own studio, Ray aided Atkins with tonal services for years. Katha House, Ray's daughter, remembers this work well. "Chet would bring over a guitar and he'd say what he didn't like about it, and the first thing my dad would do is pull all the wiring out and say, 'Who put this mess in here?'" she says. "Chet would tell him what he wanted it to sound like and, next thing you know, it would be what Chet wanted."

The work with Gretsch and the creation of new and improved pickups ran through the late 1950s and into the 1960s. Ray helped the company develop the concept of a dual-channel guitar, inventing a stereo pickup that was used by Atkins, Jimmie Webster and others who utilised thumbpicking techniques.

Elvis Presley Payroll & Expense Fund
MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
1-11 1957 No. 3
PAY TO THE ORDER OF Ray Butts Music Co. $ 986.00
Nine Hundred Eighty-six and 00/100 DOLLARS
your statement - 2 amplifiers
To NATIONAL BANK OF COMMERCE
MEMPHIS, TENN.
ELVIS PRESLEY PAYROLL & EXPENSE FUND
By Vernon Presley

As well as the first humbucker for electric guitar, Butts could claim to have developed one of the first piezo pickups for acoustic guitar, sometime in the 1960s. As it garnered little interest from those he showed it to – including Atkins, who felt the tone didn't work with his playing style – he dropped the idea. It was another instance of Ray being ahead of his time; the same concept was later picked up by others and is still widely used today.

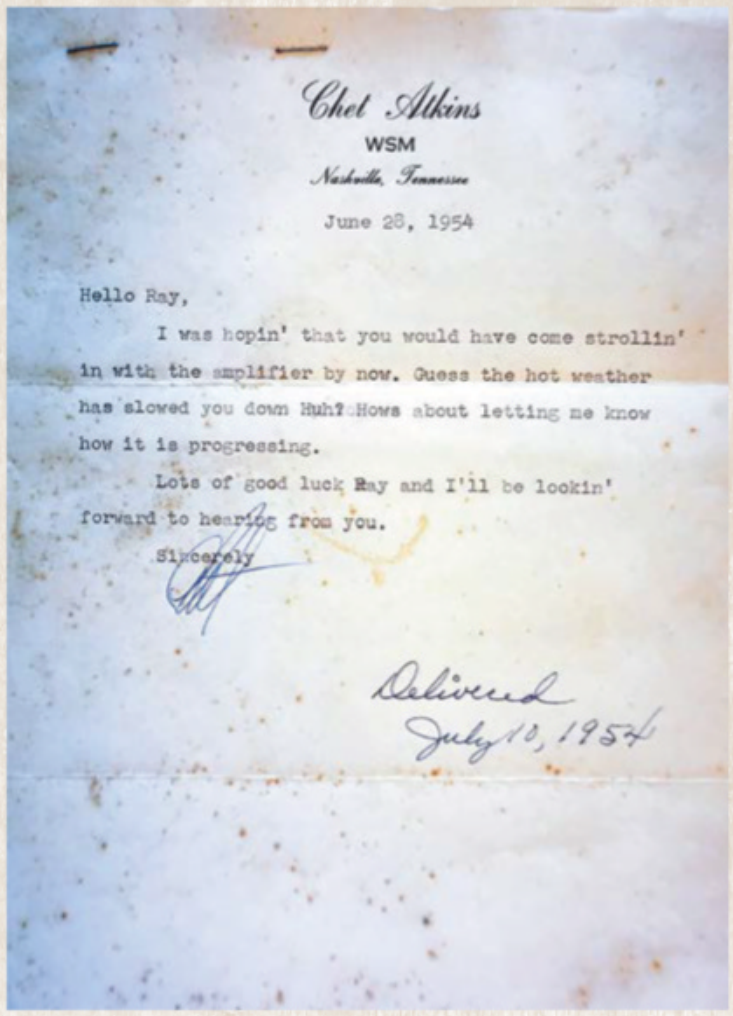
ENDLESS INVENTIONS

Ray's notebooks show him to be a tireless inventor in all things musical electronics. When his attention came to something that he thought required some improvement, he set about improving it. Some of these designs are a little mysterious now. There are notes and pictures regarding a device that goes into the output jack of a guitar, with many notebooks and sheets describing improvements to tone. But it's not clear exactly what the device does. Other projects range from microphone accessories to loudspeakers, and even an acoustic guitar preamp with graphic EQ.

Ray also redesigned products that he found lacking, often contacting companies and letting them know he had improved their work. In one instance, he wrote a letter to an organ manufacturer explaining his redesign of one of their products, offering to partner with them to make improvements and stating that he had prepared documents for a relevant patent application.

ABOVE One of Ray's early Filter'Tron prototypes

BELOW A cheque for $986 signed by Vernon Presley, likely payment for satellite amps that Butts built for Scotty Moore



Chet Atkins
WSM
Nashville, Tennessee

June 28, 1954

Hello Ray,

I was hopin' that you would have come strollin' in with the amplifier by now. Guess the hot weather has slowed you down Huh? Hows about letting me know how it is progressing.

Lots of good luck Ray and I'll be lookin' forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely

Delivered July 10, 1954

"HE WASN'T A BUSINESSMAN AND HE NEVER PUSHED IT FURTHER. HE COULD HAVE DIED A WEALTHY MAN BUT HE DIDN'T. HE JUST WASN'T INTERESTED IN THE RECOGNITION"

ABOVE LEFT Ray's archives feature many notes and images regarding a device plugged into the output jack of a guitar. Exactly what this is remains a mystery – for now

ABOVE RIGHT This affably written letter from July 1954 shows that Atkins was keen to get his hands on Butts' latest innovation

Both prior to creating the EchoSonic and after its successful beginnings, Ray was making reverb and echo devices. In the early 1950s he developed a tape reverb unit with a variety of features, including a reverse reverb/delay setting attained by running the tape backwards. In February of 1954, a letter from Ray's attorney informed him that their patent application had been rejected because some parts were possibly perceived as too general or similar to other devices. It looks as though Ray, unwilling to leave an idea unperfected, continued to progress the concept after this.

In 1957, he looked to patent another reverb/echo device, this one designed to be easily installed or pre-built into any other instrument amplifiers. The idea would have appealed to players who already had a favoured amp, or those who didn't want to pay for the EchoSonic. This way they could still get that magic slapback sound when playing live with their own rig – a concept not dissimilar to later effects pedals or, indeed, the Echoplex.

LEGACY

Ray Butts seems to have been motivated by a challenge, especially when he was told that something couldn't be done. Atkins came to realise this too.

When the guitarist wanted Butts to fix his camera, instead of asking the tinkerer directly, Atkins simply left the camera on his desk. When Ray enquired about it, Atkins replied that it was broken, and that all the repair shops said it couldn't be fixed. That night, the camera was opened up and in pieces on Ray's workbench. Soon enough it was in working order again.

Bringing a product to market and building an entire company around it? These things didn't engage Ray quite so much. "He wasn't a businessman and he never pushed it further," says Katha. "He could have died a wealthy man but he didn't."

This sheds some light on why some of Ray's remarkable inventions didn't garner even greater acclaim – or, in some cases, didn't go into production at all. But it also helps explain why the name Ray Butts isn't as prominent in the minds of guitarists as Leo Fender, Les Paul and others. It seems that brand, marketing, growth and self-aggrandisement were all foreign concepts to Butts. "He just wasn't interested in the recognition," says Katha.

What Ray Butts cared about was perfecting the tools that musicians had at their disposal. Happily, it seems like his importance to the development of guitar gear and the evolution of pop music is finally becoming more widely recognised. As well as the impact his inventions have had on the story of the guitar, Ray's legacy can be seen in how much he influences the tinkerers and tone-shapers of today.

NEXT TIME: In the final instalment of our Maker's Marks series, TV Jones discusses more incredible finds among Ray's possessions, the influence these inventions are having on pickup development today, and how he looks to carry on the inventor's spirit in his own work.

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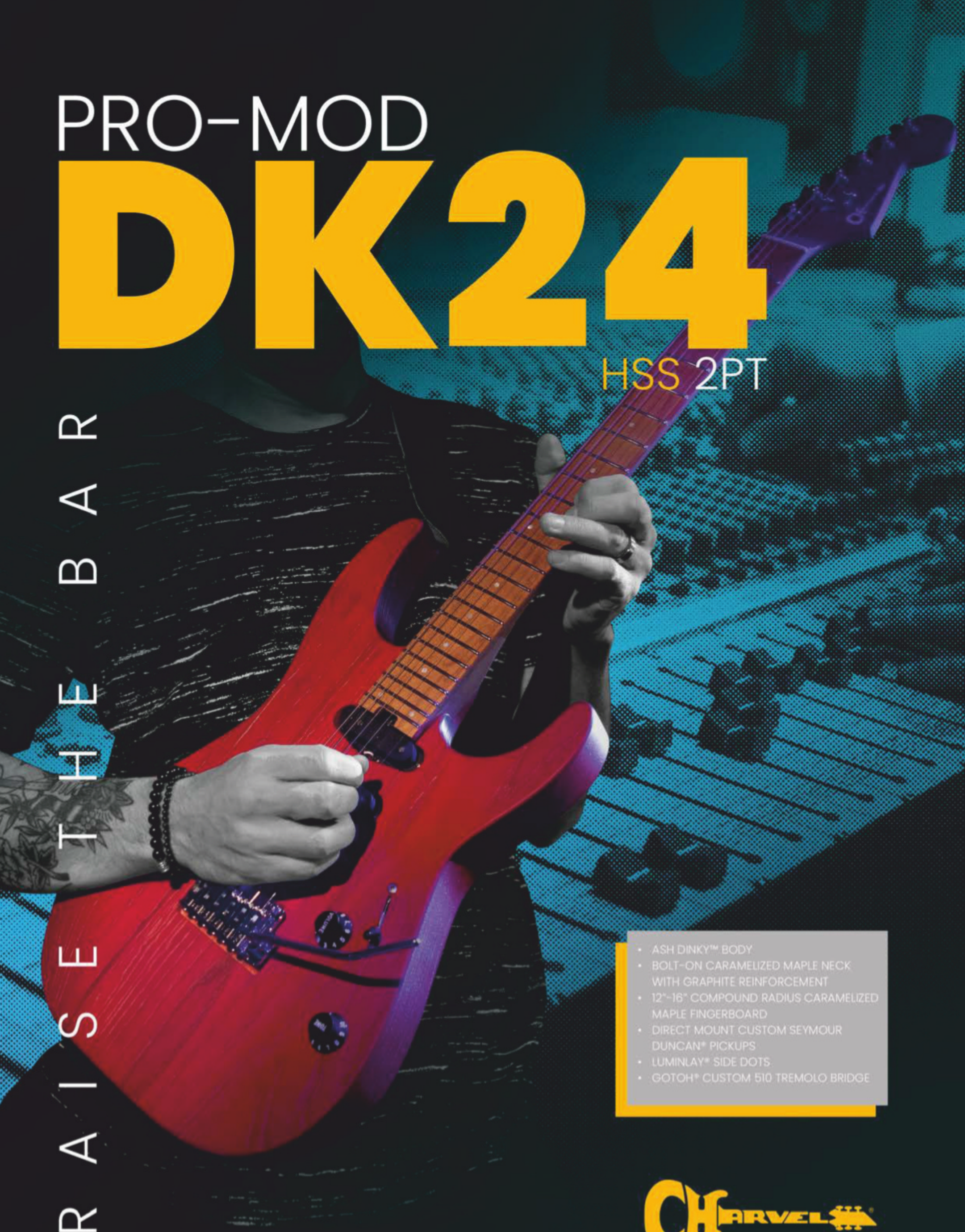

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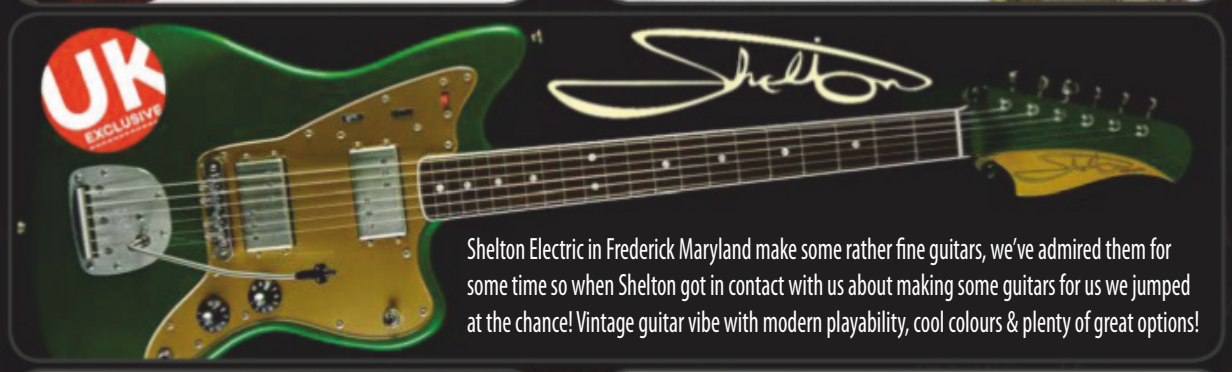

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REVIEWS

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FENDER
PLAYER MUSTANG & PLAYER DUO-SONIC

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Two more Fender gems get the Player Series treatment – and you don't have to be a beginner to get a kick out of these short-scale 'student' models

The Mustang and Duo-Sonic might look similar but the philosophical divide between them runs so deep that it's a miracle we were able to photograph them together. Look closely at the shape of the Mustang's gold body and you will see that its waist is a few inches further back on the treble side than on the bass side. That's right: this is an offset-waist design – and the Duo-Sonic isn't. This means war.

Saddle up: both models sport a hardtail bridge with bent steel saddles

Alright, it doesn't quite mean *war* (we wouldn't want to see these beauties damaged anyway). But what this pair of affordable cuties demonstrates is just how much Fender has been willing to blur the lines between mainstream Strat stylings and underdog offsets of late. In fact, these two recent additions to the Player Series have evolved from 2016 models that were confusingly listed in the Offset Series. Aside from their differing body shapes, these are natural siblings: both short-scale 'student' guitars, both with twin single-coil pickups, both dripping with indie cred.

In terms of core specs, the similarities go much further. Both instruments have the same basic construction – slightly slimmed-down alder body, medium C-shaped maple neck with maple or pau ferro fingerboard

Two-horse race: the Mustang's tones have more of an offset flavour than those of the Duo-Sonic

(depending on colour), 24-inch scale – and each has the same fixed bridge with bent steel saddles and through-body stringing. In the case of the Mustang, this might be considered heresy, but the Duo-Sonic never had a whammy bar.

Other than that short scale – which is still more than the 22.5 inches you'd have been whizzing up and down if you'd bought an original Duo-Sonic in 1956 – these guitars feel close in character to the Fender Player Lead II we reviewed in issue 380. Only now you're getting your retro chic from the pre-CBS era – and for £50 less.

There are no bright psychedelic green or purple finishes here, though. This luscious Firemist Gold is as bold as it gets for the Mustang, while the Duo-Sonic's green and blue options keep things tasteful for those who find the sweetness of the Desert Sand finish – complete with gold aluminium scratchplate – a little cloying. The latter is basically a banoffee pie in guitar form, but that's what the early ones looked like.

There are other minor differences too. The Mustang has a bigger headstock, just as it did when the model arrived in 1964. There's something more significant going on with the pickups though. Give yourself a pat on the back if you noticed that the Duo-Sonic's bridge pickup isn't angled like the one on the Mustang. There's more to this than meets the eye too. While the units themselves look identical – and all four give DC resistance readings in the low sixes – they're not actually the same across both models. Exactly how different they are, we'll find out soon enough.

Dynamic duo: the Duo-Sonic has a more compact headstock than the Mustang

Maple story: both guitars have maple necks, and the Duo-Sonic's 'board is maple too

IN USE

Given the similar builds of these guitars, any major differences in acoustic tone can probably be put down to the standard variances you'll get between any two slabs of the same wood. For the record, though, the contrast is quite dramatic: both these Fenders are lightweights sonically as well as physically but the Duo-Sonic has much more midrange spank. Could that be down to the aluminium stratchplate?

It's the Mustang, though, that wins the race to the amplifier, because we're simply dying to find out whether it really sounds like an offset or whether this is merely a two-pickup Stratocaster in disguise. The answer, we're relieved to report, is that this guitar is very much worthy of the model name on its headstock.

There's nothing in these low-output pickups that's likely to make up for the lack of body in its acoustic voice but if you're primarily a rhythm guitarist looking for an easy player with bags of cheeky chime, this Mustang simply must be a contender. Nicely fretted and well set up out of the box, it sings out through a clean amp with a biting top end and a tangy midrange that's definitely more Jaguar than Strat or Tele.

The phasey middle position is especially tasty, and it's surprising how little that fixed bridge detracts from the classic percussive character common to most offsets. It does bring one obvious disadvantage, mind: if you want to add atmospheric vibrato to clean chords, you're going to have to give the neck a real throttling and shake it around like it's a giant maraca.

This isn't a guitar designed for high-speed shredding or raunchy blues but it doesn't object to a bit of crunch or grungy fuzz. You might want to turn the tone knob down for the heavy stuff though, unless you're prepared for the kind of stinging treble that can dissolve earwax.

We expect the Duo-Sonic to be more of the same – but we're proved wrong quicker than you can say 'plunk'. This is a different guitar, and not in the way we were led to anticipate by its forthright acoustic voice.

It can't be all about the shape, so it must be down to those pickups. They're a lot less perky than those in the Mustang – and that, combined with the short scale, is a formula for something ever so slightly timid. There's no shimmery treble or complex midrange, just a pleasantly balanced single-coil sound.

Stratocaster fans might be more at home with this model, as it offers some of the airiness and cluck associated with Fender's most famous double-cut. Served with a chunk of overdrive, it can get pretty soulful, most notably on the neck pickup, and at high gain levels its top end is easier to control than that of the Mustang. It's a less immediately seductive guitar, however. While the Player Mustang has a you-know-you-want-me twinkle in its eye, the Duo-Sonic is most likely to appeal as a practical choice for those who like Strat-style tones but find full-scale guitars a stretch.

What's clear in the end is that both guitars live up to the associations of their respective body types: the bluesy 'straight' guitar versus the impudent offset. Maybe that line isn't so blurred after all.

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER MUSTANG
PRICE £549
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Offset double-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 9.5" radius pau ferro fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Through-body bridge with bent steel saddles, sealed tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Fender Mustang single-coil pickups, master volume and tone, three-way pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24"/610mm
NECK WIDTH 41.7mm at nut, 51.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.4mm at first fret, 23.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.0kg/6.7lb
FINISH Firemist Gold (as reviewed), Sienna Sunburst and Sonic Blue (both with maple fingerboard)
LEFT-HANDERS No

8/10 **Full of twinkly character, this is an easy and enjoyable introduction to the world of offset-waist guitars**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender Vintera '60s Mustang **£749**, Squier Classic Vibe '60s Mustang **£369**, Harmony Juno **£999**

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER DUO-SONIC
PRICE £549
DESCRIPTION 6-string solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Double-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 9.5" radius maple fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium-jumbo frets and synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Through-body bridge with bent steel saddles, sealed tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Fender Duo-Sonic pickups, master volume and tone, three-way pickup-selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24"/610mm
NECK WIDTH 41.7mm at nut, 51.2mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.3mm at first fret, 22.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.0kg/6.7lb
FINISH Desert Sand (as reviewed), Tidepool, Seafoam Green (pau ferro fingerboard)
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com

8/10 **A nice all-rounder with some Strat-like skills, even if it sounds somewhat tame next to the Mustang**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Fender Player Lead II **£599**, Squier Classic Vibe '60s Stratocaster **£369**, G&L Tribute Fallout **£379**

VOLUME
TONE

RIVOLTA
MONDATA BARITONE VII

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Will this do-it-all baritone prove to be another chart-topper for the Dennis Fano hit factory?

We first reviewed the Rivolta Mondata in 2018 and were mightily impressed with this Dennis Fano-designed mashup of Rickenbacker and Firebird stylings. NAMM 2020 saw a baritone version join the growing Rivolta family, and we couldn't wait to spend some meaningful time with a model that was comfortably one of the highlights of the show.

Built around a 28-inch scale length, the Mondata Baritone VII retains the body outline and construction style of Rivolta's 25-inch scale Mondata VIII and XVIII models. The chambered and double-bound offset mahogany body features a German carve and Firebird-style raised centre, though the neck is set maple rather than a neck-through design.

The full-width aged pearloid block inlays set into the rich chocolate-brown ebony fingerboard are a stylish touch reminiscent of European instruments of the 1960s, while the twin gold scratchplates and Fuoco Burst finish make for an alluring combination.

Though baritones have earned their place in the modern heavy rock and metal player's arsenal, the presence of slider switches for phase and coil-split modes hints that this instrument has more to offer than chugging powerchords – the same goes for the presence of Rivolta's Novanta neck P-90 alongside the Brevetto humbucker at the bridge.

The flared centre section offers enough space for a Bigsby B5 but our desire to wobble is curtailed by the presence of a stop tailpiece behind the Nashville-style tune-o-matic bridge. At the headstock end, the strings are anchored by a smooth and trouble-free set of Kluson-style Wilkinson units, while including 'By Novo Guitars' on the peghead decal leaves no doubt that this is a production instrument with serious boutique pedigree.

IN USE

Although the Mondata Baritone VII is strung with medium-gauge 0.014-0.068 strings and tuned B-B at the factory, the wound D doesn't prove too much of an impediment to executing blues or even country bends. Thanks to domed fret ends and softened binding edges, the feel is fast and slinky, while the neck dimensions make the acclimatisation period for regular six-string players mercifully brief.

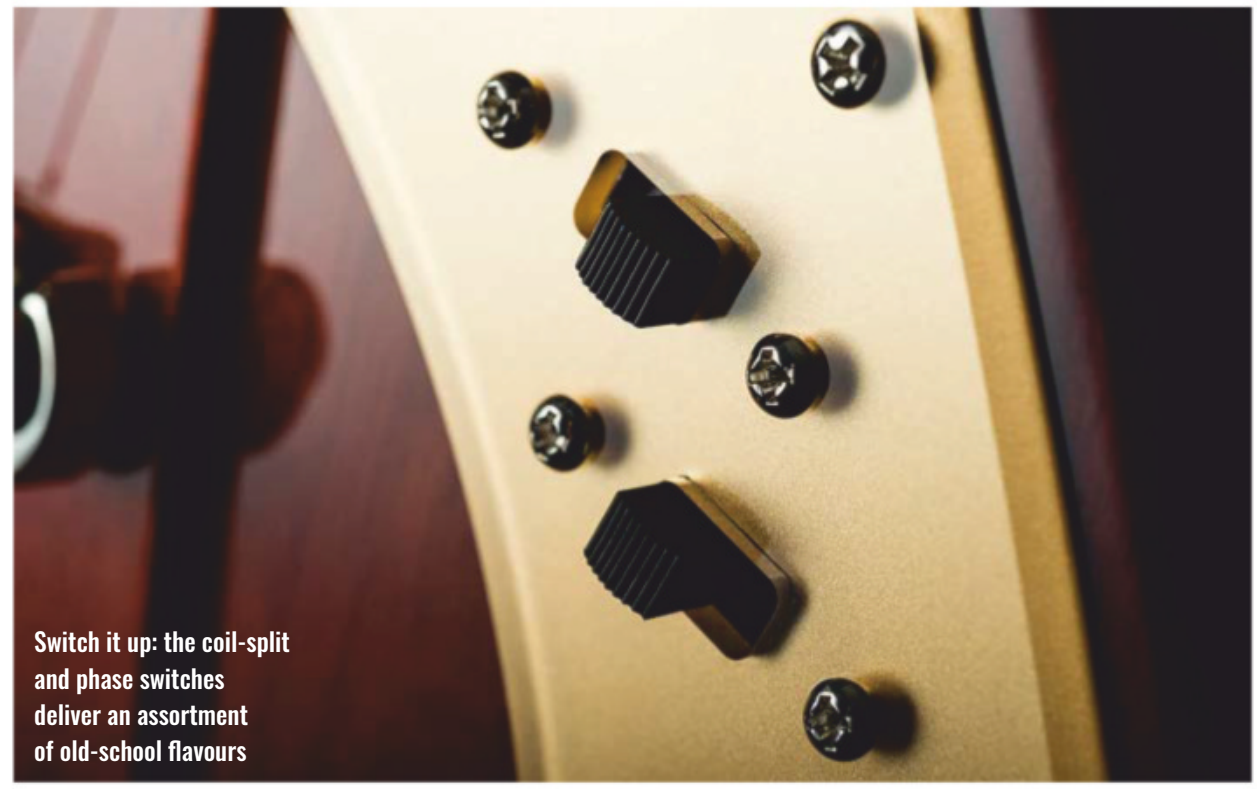
The pickup voicings ensure that while overdriven chords, riffs and lead lines can get fantastically thick and greasy, there's still plenty of clarity and upper-harmonic interest, especially when boosted with a Klon, Tube Screamer or both. Clean things up, add some reverb and tremolo and you can nail *Wichita Lineman* and *Twin Peaks*-style atmospherics.

Low down: flip to the neck P-90 for convincing 1960s bass tones

Block party: the ebony 'board boasts full-width aged pearloid block inlays

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,168
DESCRIPTION 6-string offset-waist baritone electric, made in South Korea
BUILD Chambered double-bound mahogany body with German carve and raised centre block, set maple neck with C+ profile, 12" radius ebony fingerboard with aged pearloid block inlays and 24 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Wilkinson vintage-style machineheads, tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece
ELECTRONICS Rivolta Novanta P-90 (neck) and Brevetto humbucking (bridge) pickups, three-way toggle pickup-selector switch, master volume, master tone, coil-split and phase switches
SCALE LENGTH 28"/711mm
NECK WIDTH 43.1mm at nut, 51.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.9mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 34.8mm at nut, 50.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.58kg/7.9lb
FINISH Fuoco Burst (as reviewed), Toro Black, Laguna Blue
OPTIONS Premium soft case (£97)
LEFT-HANDERS Yes (Fuoco Burst only, no upcharge)
CONTACT coda-music.com, rivoltaguitars.com



Switch it up: the coil-split and phase switches deliver an assortment of old-school flavours

It's even possible to generate convincing 1960s bass tones, which can be enhanced by using a dedicated bass amp or plug-in.

If the baritone register's depth presents mix issues, the Mondata VII helpfully comes loaded with two ways to hollow things out and slice off some bottom end. Flip the coil-split slider switch (closest to the tone control) to the up position and it's a passport to vintage twang – just add slapback and Brylcreem. In the middle position, the pairing of the split-coil bridge 'bucker and neck P-90 works beautifully for indie arpeggios and fingerpicking, with an airy sweetness complemented by long natural sustain and an even decay.

With the phase switch pushed to the down position (this can cause an audible click, so be careful with your timing) the middle setting takes on a more strangled and nasal quality perfect for those doubled 'tic-tac' bass parts. There are two flavours, depending on how the bridge pickup is set – engage both phase and coil-split switches to access maximum bass cut and cocked-wah quack.

Used to create a variety of bass, rhythm and lead voices during a recording session, the distinct tones on offer here stack up very nicely in the mix and never feel like a compromise. Yet, though the Mondata Baritone VII is supremely versatile, it's surely far too good-looking to be condemned to life with a studio tan.

Happily, if you decide to take it out into the wild, you'll notice that it balances well on a strap too. The complete package.

9/10 **Versatility, style and a secret weapon for recording sessions**

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TAYLOR
BUILDER'S EDITION 652CE

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS HUW PRICE

With compact dimensions, softened edges and reverse stringing, this is no ordinary 12-string

Compared to the many Taylors we've reviewed in years past, this instrument is a timely reminder of just how much the Californian company's guitars have changed. Things have mellowed considerably, but rather than dispense entirely with the elements that have been so successful, it feels like there's been a natural but rapid evolution.

The vibe remains contemporary but the softened look complements a refined feel that Taylor's master guitar designer Andy Powers has achieved by attending to a host of fine details. Most obvious here on this Grand Concert Builder's Edition 12-string is the way the body edges are rounded over – a feature made possible by ditching the plastic binding. The body isn't actually bound at all, but the sunburst shading outside the purfling makes it appear as if it is.

In the same spirit, the ebony fretboard edges are rolled too – a feature that's more commonly associated with well-played vintage guitars and boutique luthiery. Additionally, there's a bevelled arm rest, along with a bevel in the cutaway. Combined with a shortened scale length and the compacting effect of a 12th fret neck join, the emphasis here is firmly on ease of playing.

As you might expect at this price, the 652ce's timber specifications impress. The guitar sports a torrefied Sitka spruce top, and boasts figured bigleaf maple for the back and sides. Enhanced by the beautiful Silent Satin Wild Honey Burst finish, the figuring is especially vivid and three-dimensional on the sides but, on this example at least, the timber used for the back is rather more restrained.

By the dozen: the ebony-overlaid headstock sports Gotoh 510 tuners

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £3,599 (inc hard-shell case)
DESCRIPTION 12-string electro-acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Torrefied Sitka spruce top with V-Class bracing, arm and cutaway chamfers, bigleaf maple back and sides, hard rock maple neck, West African ebony bridge, bridge pins, fingerboard, heel cap and peghead overlay, 12th fret neck join, 18 frets, Gotoh 510 tuners, Graph Tech nut and compensated Micarta saddle, mother-of-pearl headstock and fretboard inlays
ELECTRONICS Expression System 2 pickup
SCALE LENGTH 632mm/24 7/8”
NECK WIDTH 47.6mm at nut, 59.1 mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 24.1mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 41.7mm at nut, 58.3mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.2kg/4.8lb
LEFT HANDERS No
FINISH Silent Satin Wild Honey Burst (as reviewed) or Natural
CONTACT taylorguitars.com

The hard rock maple neck displays no figuring but a shaded finish integrates it nicely into the overall aesthetic, while at the same time de-emphasising the stacked heel and scarf-jointed headstock. With regard to the latter, the structure is likely to withstand the added stresses of six extra strings far better than a one-piece neck would.

Additional features include a Curve Wing bridge – another refinement driven by player comfort – and Gotoh 510 machineheads. Its six bridge pins leave plenty of space for the three ES2 piezo sensors, and make swapping strings easier than it would be with 12, while the 21:1 ratio tuners are accurate and precise. We can recall countless six-string acoustics that have proved tougher to tune than this 12-string.

It helps that the Graph Tech nut’s slots are cut to perfection and the strings glide through without ever pinging. No doubt the slotted Micarta saddle contributes too – it’s almost a work of sculpture. Look closely and you’ll see that it goes beyond simple compensation, with different takeoff points for individual strings – even when they’re closely paired.

IN USE

The Builder’s Edition 652ce arrives with a set of coated Elixir phosphor bronze strings and, as always, they sound warm and chimey. The coating is unnoticeable and, considering the additional cost of a 12-string set, it makes sense to use strings that will retain their vibrancy for months rather than weeks – if you’re lucky.

Taylor’s recent 12-strings have offered almost effortless playability and the 652ce is no exception. Despite an extraordinarily low action, there are no rattles and buzzes,

Play the angles: the bevelled arm rest on the lower bout is one of many concessions to player comfort

and from a playing perspective rather than a sonic one, it's easy to forget about those extra six strings.

We're particularly enamoured with the neck profile, which somehow still conforms comfortably to the crook of the hand despite its increased width. It feels like there's the merest hint of a V, which is never a bad thing in our books.

Considering the relatively compact dimensions of the Taylor's Grand Concert body, it shouldn't come as a shock that its tone has little in common with the booming drive and power of Tim Buckley and Pete Townshend's Guild 12s. Rather, the 652ce is amply loud and full, and its timbre is characterised more by balance and poise than by the accentuated extremes of the frequency range.

Ahead of the curve: the Micarta saddle goes beyond simple compensation, with different takeoff points for individual strings

Royal flush: the ebony fretboard features Scepter inlays

Perhaps it's the 12th-fret neck join but we actually hear something of that lap harpsichord tone that we associate with the bluesy smaller-bodied 12-strings – although the V-Class architecture and the precision-engineered saddle ensure there's no honky-tonk-style wayward tuning. It's not bluesy or retro, because the 652ce is too neutral for that, but there's a crisp precision and delicate shimmer here.

The ease of playing and the accurate intonation encourage us to venture beyond straightforward rhythm moves and jangly arpeggios. Soon we're picking out lead lines and even plucking up the courage to try some fingerstyle. You need to be accurate for this but it helps that the fundamental string in each octave pair is positioned on the bass side, as Rickenbacker has always done it.

Next, we explore some dropped and open tunings. The 652ce copes admirably when tuned down to C, and the lows retain sufficient weight and focus to lend a warm thrum that supports meandering excursions on the plain strings. In common with all of Taylor's V-Class braced models, the 652ce has a 'produced' quality straight out of the box. It's almost like it has been EQ'd and compressed to enhance the natural tone, but not in a way that sounds contrived or compromises dynamic response.

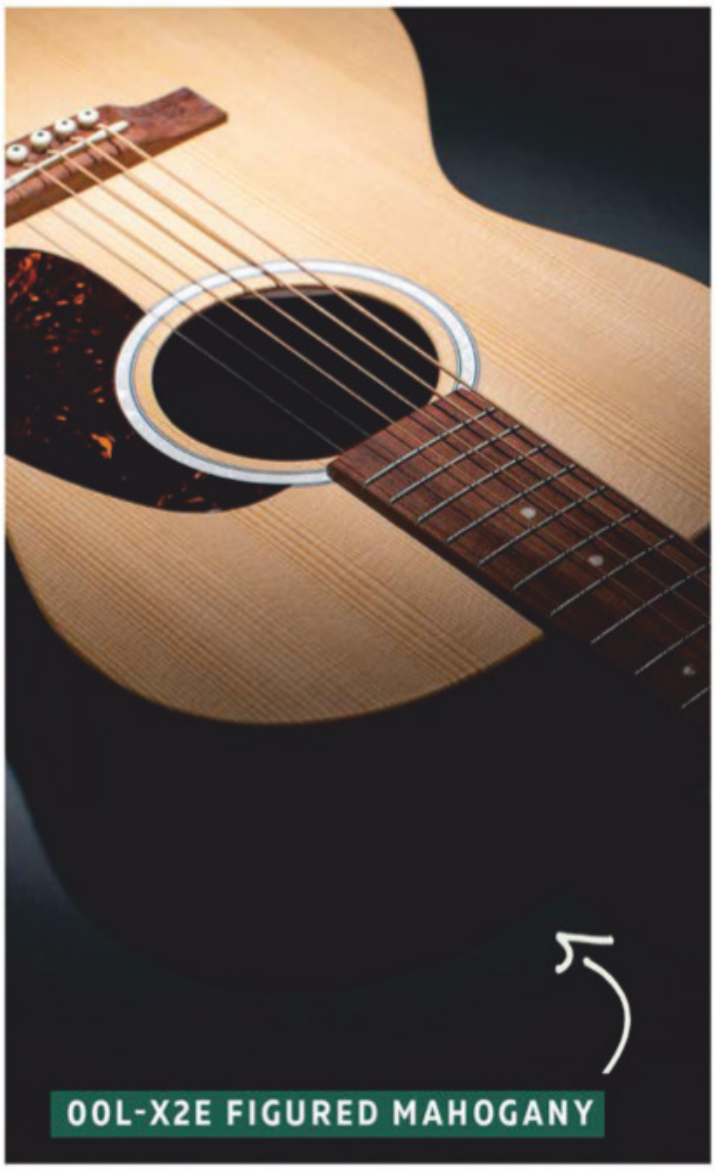
The Expression System 2 pickup suits the 652ce particularly well. It can capture the natural tone impressively, but the treble and bass controls have well-chosen frequency centres for enhancing the sound. We would have no reservations about recording this guitar direct in situations where spillage could cause issues.

Every part of this guitar, from its design and superb materials and build quality to its tone, extraordinary intonation and playability, combine to make this a complete package. Taylor has long made formidably effective and practical tools but the 652ce is an inspiring musical companion, and a wonderful looking and sounding instrument into the bargain.

9/10 **Taylor is laying down a marker as one of the world's premier manufacturers of 12-string electro-acoustics**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Lowden O32 12-string **£3,945**, Guild F512E **£3,899**, Froggy Bottom K Deluxe 12 **£5,213**



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MCNALLY GUITARS
PRESENTATION OM CELTIC IVY

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

This relatively new name to the acoustic guitar-making scene comes with a strong pedigree

Ciaran McNally began his career as a luthier at the tender age of 16, studying at the Lagan Lutherie School in Northern Ireland. Now 29, McNally spent the interim years working at two of the UK's most august acoustic institutions: Lowden Guitars in Downpatrick, and Atkin Guitars in Canterbury. These days, McNally builds independently from his workshop in Craigavon, County Armagh. He's made more than 300 complete instruments over the course of his career, and has had a hand in more than 1,000 builds, but our review guitar is only the 45th created under his own name.

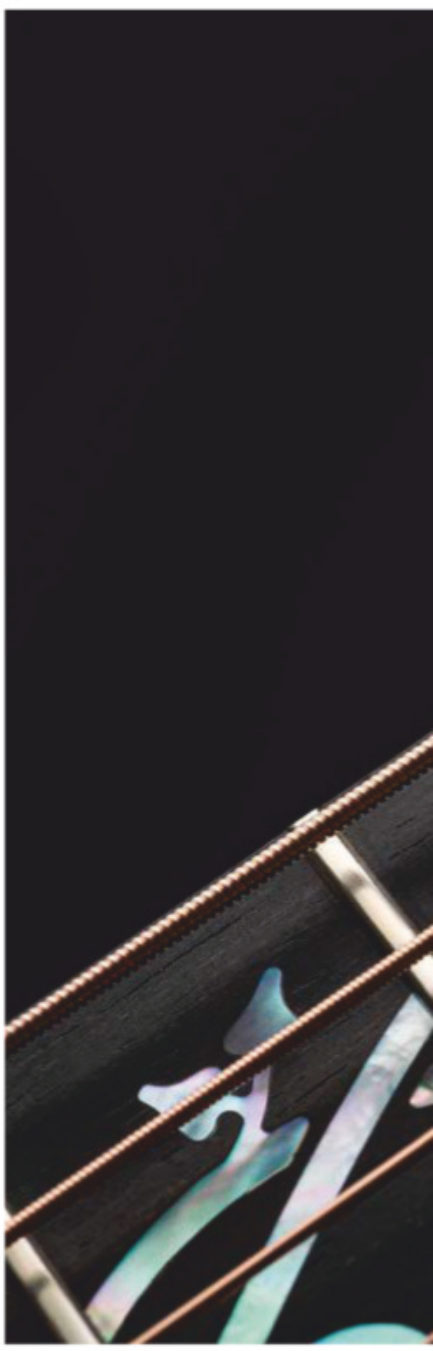
Considering the number of mid-size guitars on the workbenches of luthiers around the world, the Orchestra Model appellation can now mean just about anything from ultra-traditional Martin-inspired instruments to futuristic Somogyi-style art pieces. Given his pedigree, it's no surprise that McNally takes inspiration from both sides of the Atlantic, perhaps leaning more towards the US.

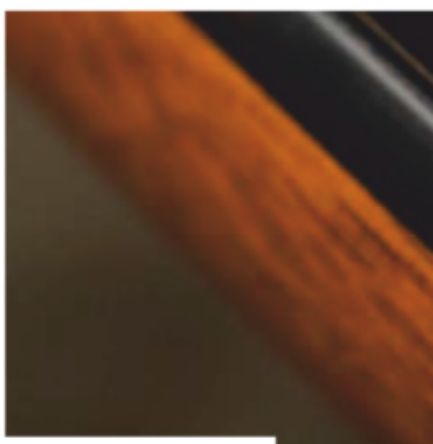
This elegant guitar, with its slightly deeper body and tapered headstock, is certainly more Santa Cruz, California than Nazareth, Pennsylvania.

The combination of Adirondack spruce soundboard with walnut back and sides can be wonderful in the right hands, even more so when used in a medium to large body. We find it most effective in the works of luthiers who blend modern and traditional techniques, such as Vermont's iconic Froggy Bottom Guitars and, indeed, Ciaran McNally.

It's clear that the Northern Irishman not only knows his woods but recognises what works within the context of his own guitars. He also has an eye for quality – the English walnut set chosen for the back and sides (that's *Juglans regia* for the uninitiated, as opposed to the more common Claro and black walnut varieties) is absolutely superb.

Chasing rainbows: multihued abalone purfling outlines the lush English walnut back





KEY FEATURES

PRICE From £2,650 (£5,730 as reviewed) inc hard case
DESCRIPTION 6-string acoustic guitar, made in Northern Ireland
BUILD Presentation-grade OM in Adirondack spruce with baked European spruce bracing, figured English walnut back and sides, mahogany neck with ebony fingerboard, full fretboard 'Celtic Ivy' inlay, abalone back, sides and top purfling, ebony headstock overlays (front and back), bone nut and saddle, ebony bridge and pins, ebony binding
HARDWARE Gotoh SG381 tuners with ebony buttons
SCALE LENGTH 25.4"/645mm
NECK WIDTH 44.6mm at nut, 55.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 26mm at 10th fret
STRING SPACING 38mm at nut, 58mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.47kg/3.24lb
FINISH Gloss acid catalysed lacquer (satin on rear of neck)
LEFT-HANDERS Yes (no extra charge)
CONTACT mcnallyguitars.com

It has a deep 3D chatoyance and a slight gold-green sheen to the back that lives up to the guitar's name. The creamy white Adirondack soundboard, braced with baked European spruce, is flawless and vibrant, and has a deep, resonating sweet spot behind the bridge.

But for the lack of laminate construction, the guitar's 14-fret mahogany neck looks like it could have come from a Lowden in both colour and finish. That said, it's a girthier squeeze than you'd usually find coming out of Downpatrick, with a deep 'D' carve that fills the left hand beautifully. The heel starts to flare before the 12th fret and the neck itself has already reached a depth of 26mm at the 10th fret.

It's robust, solid, and inspiring stuff, but we would have liked to see something other than a single side dot to mark the octave. However, if you are considering a custom order, McNally can, of course, carve any neck profile with any markers you'd like.

Reaching out: the Celtic Ivy inlay runs the length of the ebony 'board

Tie the knot: the headstock features McNally's Celtic triquetra knot logo

The OM Celtic Ivy takes its name from the intricate abalone inlay work that adorns the entirety of the ebony fretboard, with its delicate tendrils extending onto both the headstock and the rosette. It's a flowing and organic design that fuses European and American luthiery flourishes; the single ivy leaf inlaid into the sculpted ebony bridge is a particularly nice touch. There are a couple of small areas that we think would benefit from a little ebony dust and Super Glue to fill the gaps, but that's the work of a moment. The aesthetic theme is reinforced with full top, back and sides edge-purfling in shining rainbow abalone.

IN USE

Our review model arrived with its strings slackened for transit, and getting it to concert pitch reveals much about its character. This is a powerful guitar but it remains balanced across the register. The trebles are crisp and detailed along the length of the neck and the midrange is woody and expressive.

Walnut tends to lend a fundamental quality to the note and this is perhaps most noticeable in the Celtic Ivy's bass response. Rather than a pillow-soft Bay Area sound, we're greeted with a stentorian 'bong' that remains articulate and sonorous all the way up the neck without overpowering the rest of the sonic spectrum.

Tonewood controversy is most assuredly a thing, and there are many internet-poisoned individuals who'll likely dismiss Adirondack spruce as needing time to open up.

New leaf: the sculpted ebony bridge's leaf inlay is an attractive touch

That may occasionally be true in the context of production instruments made in numbers but with this McNally we have a prime example of how a skilled luthier will bring the best out of their carefully selected materials, creating a guitar that sounds impressively good from day one.

In terms of tuning, DADGAD feels like the Celtic Ivy's natural habitat, and this guitar really shines in dropped and altered tunings. The fast response of the lightly braced soundboard in conjunction with the 25.4-inch scale length makes this an inspiring instrument for solo fingerstyle players. Complex chords ring out with gravitas and grace, and single-note lines come through with enough power and focus to make their point unaccompanied. Critically for some positions, the nut is smoothly carved with no sharp corners.

Many have tried to convincingly marry disparate transatlantic styles of luthiery but few in the custom acoustic guitar world have succeeded. It's an interesting scene; some clients are inclined to spend more money on tonewood upgrades than Ciaran McNally currently charges for a finished instrument. It's also a market that demands the highest standards of fit and finish, and in that regard there's still some scope for improvement in the more nuanced aspects of this guitar's execution. The headstock logo and maker's name inlay, for example, feel just a touch ungainly compared to the delicate inlay work that runs throughout the rest of the instrument, and the fret ends could use another kiss with a file on the treble side, but it's an impressive shot across the bows.

On the basis of sound alone, a McNally Orchestra Model, even in full presentation format, represents exceptional value for money. At his current price-point it would be no surprise to see Ciaran McNally rising further up the ranks in the acoustic luthiery scene. We very much look forward to seeing what he does next.

9/10 **A powerful, beautiful and expressive instrument from a young luthier who shows a great deal of promise**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Lowden FM50 Walnut & Sitka Spruce **£5,135**, Martin OM-28 Reimagined **£2,950**, Turnstone TM Model from **£6,500**

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Dan Drive
Tweedy

DANDRIVE TWEEDY

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €369
DESCRIPTION Overdrive pedal, made in Germany
CONTROLS Level, drive, tone
FEATURES Lacquered tweed cloth covering, true-bypass switching, powered by 9V battery or 9V DC 2.1mm centre negative adaptor
DIMENSIONS 121 x 64 x 55mm
CONTACT atbguitars.com, Instagram @dandrivepedal

Feel the need for tweed? DanDrive's latest stompbox promises to bring the ragged glory of a 1950s Fender to your pedalboard

It's no secret that many of the most revered guitar tones in history have emanated from the humble tweed-covered Fender amps of the 1950s. But in today's high-tech world of plug-ins, presets and profiles, can a three-knob pedal truly fulfil your craving for tweed tone?

Fuzz-pedal aficionado DanDrive's Tweedy is an overdrive pedal designed to impart the sonic characteristics of an early 1950s Fender 5B3 Deluxe, whose octal 6SC7 preamp valves differ tonally from the more ubiquitous nine-pin 12AX7, and relay a subtly richer midrange and less top-end bite. This writer's own 1952 5A3 Deluxe is one of our all-time favourite amps for overdriven sounds, so we have high hopes that Dan Querner's latest pedal, resplendent in its shellac-lacquered tweed covering, will sound as good as it looks.

IN USE

Upon plugging a Stratocaster into a clean Fender amp, we're immediately impressed. The Tweedy infuses our tone with the raw organic overdrive and sweet midrange response and feel of an early tweed Deluxe. While it's not the smooth and flattering overdrive of a Tube Screamer, the organic and gritty break-up tones of the Tweedy are far more realistically amp-like.

In fact, it's so amp-like that we have to open it up to check that Dan hasn't magically crammed a pair of octals into the enclosure. Although there are obviously no valves or transformers in sight, we do discover something else that's almost certainly unique to this or any other pedal: a tweed-coated circuit board.

Meticulously filled with premium components, the tweed covering doesn't impact on the pedal's sonics but we love this kind of madcap attention to detail. It's perhaps a shame that the metal base of our review unit has been left bare but we're told that this is an early example and the bases of production versions will match the rest of the housing.

We were spellbound by DanDrive's take on the Fuzz Face circuit, the Austin Pride, and the sonic similarities between a cranked tweed amp and a Fuzz Face have more in common than you might think. Dynamic shades of guitar-controlled overdrive and clean-up? Roaring drive when cranked with plenty of level and sustain? It provides hours of fun.

Whatever guitar and amp we plug the Tweedy into, we're astonished by its ability to impart a real sense of 1950s Fender tone. This includes flattering compression for Strats, round but never flabby low-end warmth, gritty organic drive with a PAF-loaded Les Paul… the list goes on, all the while retaining that beautiful top-end transparency that tweed fans love.

9/10 **Short of splashing out on a vintage amp, there are few more convincing routes to authentic tweed tone than this**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Lovepedal Les Lius **£182**, Catalinbread Formula No. 55 **£169**, Mad Professor Big Tweedy Drive **£119**

STONE DEAF
NOISE REAPER

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Indie pedal builder Stone Deaf believes in high gain without a high noise floor – and the Noise Reaper is here to slam the gate on background bedlam

Try as we might, we can't think of another effects pedal that has its name written across the moustache of a raging Cyclops. Full marks to Stone Deaf for its design originality, then. As ever, though, it's what's on the inside that concerns us most.

As you've probably guessed, the Noise Reaper is a noise gate – and one with just a single control, for setting the gate's threshold. But it claims to be better than most at removing the stuff you don't want to hear without cutting into the stuff you do, thanks to the way it compares the clean and distorted versions of your source signal.

Who needs a noise gate? Not everyone, admittedly. But if you're a high-gain player, and especially one who has to keep things tight for percussive low-down riffing, it might be considered an essential tool.

This unit is based on the gate found in Stone Deaf's Fig Fumb and Warp Drive pedals but has send and return sockets for corralling either your noisy pedals or your amplifier's overdriving preamp (as long as it has send and return sockets of its own) in a loop. This is the way a lot of modern gates operate, so they can do their work on a distorted signal but take their cues from a clean one.

The manual includes helpful diagrams for both setup options, plus a doubling-up arrangement for in case you need to tackle noise from both preamp *and* pedals. This involves two Noise Reapers and, if we've counted correctly, seven cables. If nothing else, trying to plug all those in could make for a fun family puzzle during those long lockdown evenings.

Deaf forever: Stone Deaf is based in Rochdale, Greater Manchester

Cyclopian scape: the Cyclops-themed Noise Reaper is a real eye-opener

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £125
DESCRIPTION Noise gate pedal, made in UK
CONTROLS Threshold
FEATURES Built-in effects loop, true bypass, powered by 9V mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 111 x 73 x 51mm
CONTACT stonedeaffx.com

IN USE

We kick off with the Noise Reaper's loop wrapped around two mid-gain overdrives and a Death By Audio Waveformer Destroyer, a pedal so hellbent on spewing maximum filth that it doesn't even have a gain control. Setting the gate's threshold is easy: we start with it all the way down, switch on our dirt-generators and slowly turn it up until the roar disappears, which it does – completely.

A good gate opens quickly enough to catch the transient attack of the first note and stays open long enough to preserve the decay of the last one. The Noise Reaper is a good gate. Single notes and detuned chords burst into the room right on cue, then get plenty of room to sustain before being clamped off only when their time is well and truly up.

The way we're taken in and out of silence is about as natural as it gets; there can be a bit of jerkiness when the gate shuts on a slowly fading chord but that's pretty much inevitable and nothing that half-decent playing technique won't fix. And the beauty of the loop setup is that there's no need to adjust the gate's threshold when we turn one or two pedals off.

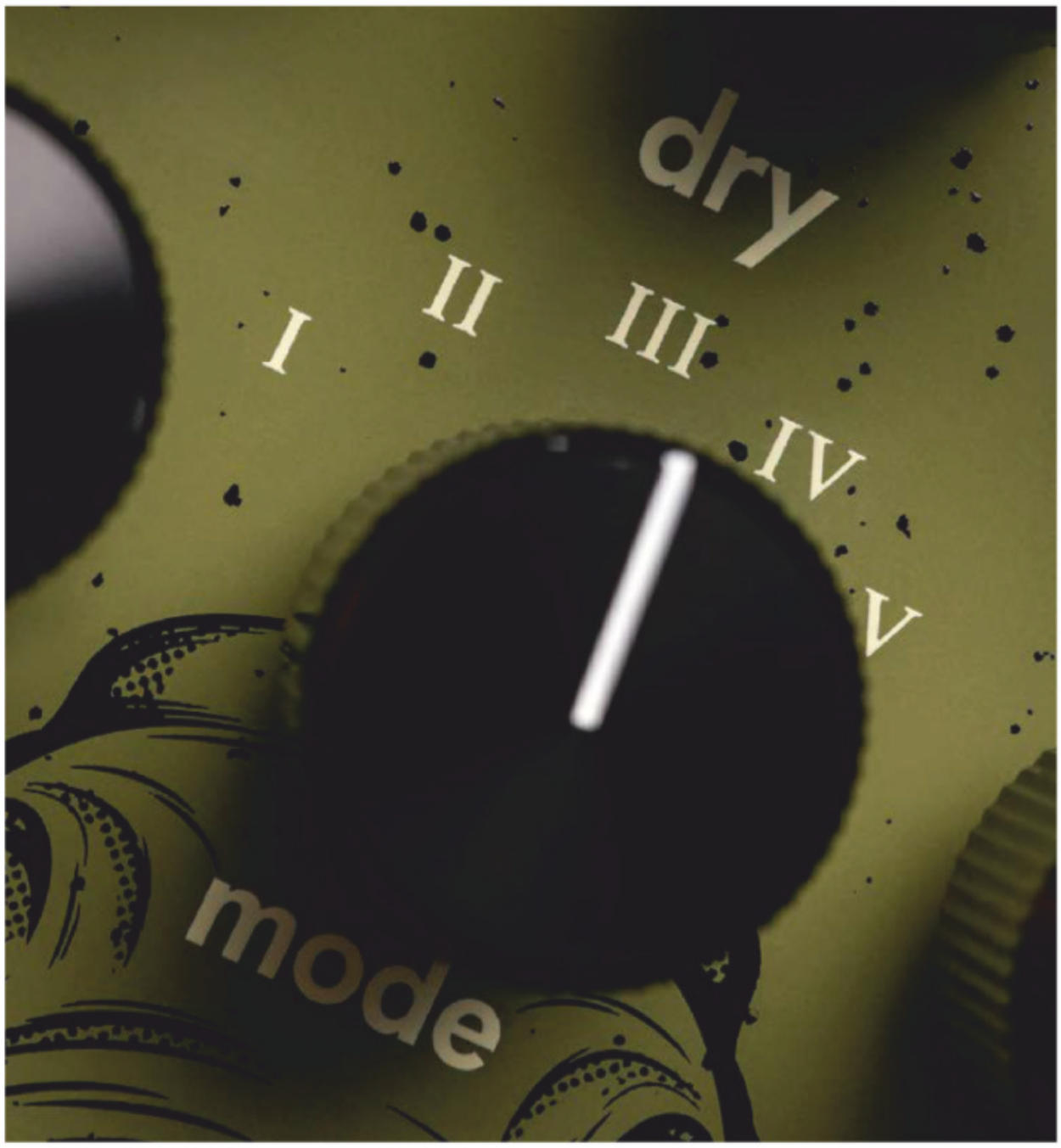
There's nothing fancy going on here. The Noise Reaper is simply a problem-solver that does its job with fuss-free precision and looks pretty damn cool in the process.

9/10 **A simple and effective noise gate that will scythe the background chaff from your heaviest tones**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

ISP Decimator II G-String **£266**, MXR Smart Gate **£134**, Boss NS-2 **£76**

vol
dry
gain
II
III
IV
bass
mode
treb
AGES
WALRUS
AUDIO



WALRUS AUDIO AGES

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Five stellar drive tones in one stompbox? Perhaps this new unit from Walrus Audio really is an overdrive for the ages…

Any guitarists hunting their one true overdrive face a dizzying array of options, from original designs to tweaked versions of the classics. It's not uncommon for pedalboards to feature several dirtboxes for a slew of filthy flavours. Different shades of drive provide multiple gears – or you can simply stack 'em all up to send your lead tone into meltdown.

Undaunted by the glut of overdriven offerings demanding buyers' attention, Oklahoma's Walrus Audio has launched the Ages five-stage overdrive, a pedalboard-friendly single-berth unit (top-mounted jacks and everything) in olive drab adorned with a silkscreened image of an angry pachyderm that hints of the fury within.

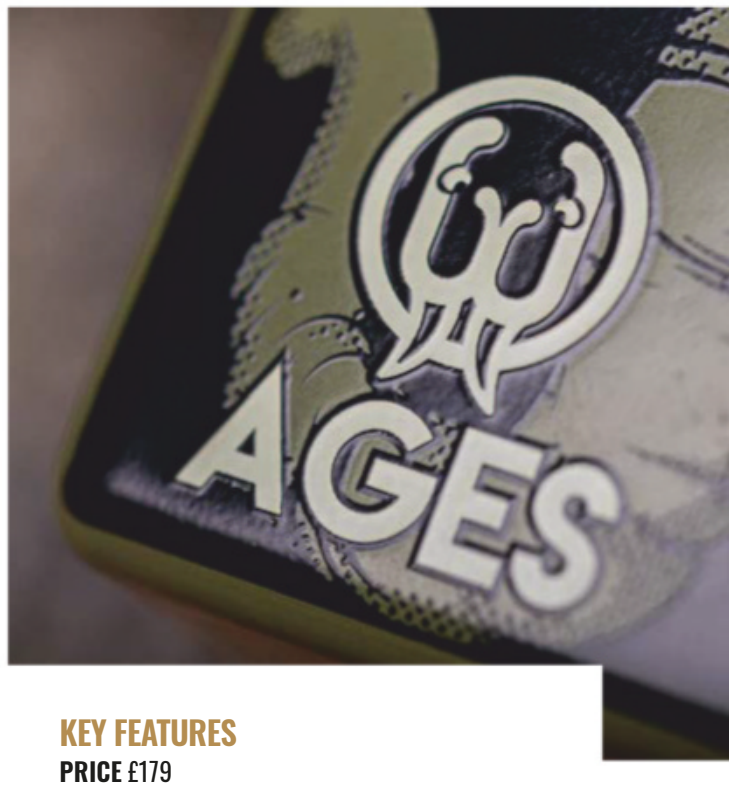
Versatility is the name of the game here and the Ages offers five separate voices, each a different combination of internal gain and clipping style. There's also a powerful dual-band EQ system, and a wet/dry control to allow for a clear attack at all times.

IN USE

The gain levels on tap increase as you travel clockwise around the mode switch and, with all knobs at noon and mode one selected, we have low gain combined with symmetric silicon low-clipping for a smooth compressed sound. It's an engaging take on the low-gain textures of an 'always on' clean boost/transparent overdrive pedal but it can certainly get spitty as and when you dial up the gain.

The second setting matches up the same low-gain mode with symmetric LED soft-clipping. This yields a more open sound, like that of a good pushed boost, and there's a lot of high-end sheen to explore, especially with single-coil pickups.

With the third setting, we encounter the first high-gain voice, in this case combined with symmetric silicon soft-clipping. We're in more aggressive territory now. There's a rush of gain here that works exceptionally well for those chugging elephantine chords.



KEY FEATURES

PRICE £179
DESCRIPTION 5-mode overdrive pedal, built in the USA
FEATURES Volume, bass, treble, gain, wet/dry, 5-way mode switch, 9V DC mains power
DIMENSIONS 64 x 52 x 120mm
CONTACT face.be, walrusaudio.com

It's an evocative lead sound too, muscular and precise, especially as you work the wet/dry control to add bite to the initial attack. It's particularly effective with P-90s.

A step to the right activates the fourth setting, which blends high gain with symmetric LED soft-clipping. The saturation is ramped up another level here and the LED clipping is responsive and grippy, and well suited to wide vibrato, screaming leads and pick harmonics.

Turning the dial once more and engaging the fifth mode unleashes the full force of a rampaging heffalump, as the Ages stampedes into crushing saturation with a combination of high gain and symmetric silicon hard-clipping. It's compressed and heavy as hell but never fizzy. Truly joyful stuff.

If you've never used an overdrive with a wet/dry control, you may be surprised at the difference it can make when sculpting your desired tone. Also, where the majority of overdrives on the market will only offer a single tone knob, Ages gives you the power to finesse both the treble and bass ends of your sound and, even at extreme settings, we find the sounds usable across a variety of contexts. Be advised, however, the settings affect each mode differently and, as such, you may need to tweak the gain and volume as you move along the dial.

9/10 **An engaging toolbox of top-quality filth from one of the most respected boutique pedal brands around**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley Super Phat Mod **£155**, Origin Effects RevivalDrive **£315**, Catalinbread Dirty Little Secret MkIII **£159**

ANALOG MAN
JIM WEIDER BIG-T TELECASTER PICKUPS

WORDS HUW PRICE

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

PRICE $125 US each
DESCRIPTION Telecaster replacement pickups, made in the US
FEATURES Alnico III magnets in bridge unit, elongated alnico V magnets in neck unit, wax potted, copper-plated steel baseplate
DC RESISTANCE 7.1k (bridge) and 6.7k (neck)
CONTACT buyanalogman.com

When a Tele-picking great joins forces with a boutique pedal aficionado and a respected pickup manufacturer to design custom pickups, expectations are bound to be high. But how do these aftermarket Telecaster pickups stack up?

Jim Weider is best known for playing his 1952 Telecaster with The Band, having stepped in for Robbie Robertson when they reformed in 1985. This pickup set is the result of a collaboration between Weider and Mike Piera of Analog Man, and manufactured by Lindy Fralin in Richmond, Virginia.

The bridge unit is a replica of the pickup in Weider's main guitar, and comes with flat polepieces, alnico III slugs and a copper-plated steel baseplate. The neck pickup departs from the vintage formula with alnico V slugs that protrude beyond the bottom flat. This creates a stronger magnetic field than a regular Tele-style neck pickup because Weider wanted a brighter and more practical tone without losing the classic look.

The cover is connected to a third leadout wire to make polarity swapping easy for compatibility with any bridge pickup. Information on the type of magnet wire isn't forthcoming but we're told they are proprietary windings and that the bridge and neck units have a DC resistance of 7.1k and 6.7k, respectively.

IN USE

Starting with both pickups set identically to our reference set, the bridge unit's output is in the same ballpark but the neck pickup is significantly more powerful, and brighter. Some balancing is therefore required, so we set the neck pickup a little lower.

Unlike some neck pickups, the Big-T doesn't lose focus or clarity as it's moved further away from the strings. Its output level reduces but it retains a full-bodied horn-like midrange with plenty of treble bite and solid lows. For reference, we compare it to the neck pickup in a 1957 Strat and find that there are strong similarities between them.

The Strat has airier trebles, while the Big-T is a little softer – the capacitive effect of the cover may be contributing a certain roundness in the upper mids. We like it a lot and, while it retains a hint of vintage Tele jazziness, it's far closer to a powerful but clear Strat pickup.

The bridge unit in our test guitar is a converted Fender lap steel pickup from 1954, which seems fair enough given that the Big-T bridge is described as a recreation of Jim Weider's '52 bridge pickup. It's a tough act to follow but the Big-T bridge unit is easily one of the most convincing early 1950s style replicas we've played.

The midrange is capable of everything from clean country quack to cocked-wah crunch, the treble boasts a lot of bite but is never shrill, and the bass response effortlessly captures the Blackguard bounce and twang on the wound strings. Just like the Big-T neck unit, it benefits from a degree of microphony, which suggests Fralin is exercising caution when potting.

With two fine but contrasting pickups, it should come as no surprise that the middle position is impressive. Its distinct tone has a pronounced midrange phasiness and more delicate trebles but no shortage of grunt. If the idea of full, assertive and clear early 1950s Telecaster tones appeals to you, then you may find that this set of pickups ticks every box and then some.

9/10 **Excellent Telecaster pickups with a vintage-accurate bridge unit and a sympathetic twist at the neck that allows for greater clarity**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

House Of Tone Texas Tea **£70 each**, Oil City Honkytonk Angel **£63 & £73**, Monty's Guitars '53 Telecaster **£190 set**

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THE RUNDOWN

SIGNATURE GUITARS

WORDS CILLIAN BREATHNACH

It seems like every guitarist has a signature model these days, but which of the current crop are worthy of your attention?

FENDER EOB SUSTAINER STRATOCASTER
£979

1 Radiohead guitarist Ed O'Brien's signature Strat may seem innocuous at first glance but, look closely at the pickups, and you'll see that this is a unique beast primed for experimentation. The onboard Fernandes Sustainer encourages players to think outside both the proverbial and pentatonic boxes – just add delay and reverb effects and you'll be creating lush ambient soundscapes in no time.

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN ST VINCENT HH
£699

2 Annie Clark's eye-catching and ergonomic signature instrument has been admired since its introduction in 2016 but its arrival in the Sterling line last year made it more accessible than ever. This HH edition comes with a pair of humbuckers, five-way switching and a rock-solid vibrato unit. Stellar playability and tones combine to create a guitar that's as versatile as it is stylish.

MANSON MATT BELLAMY META SERIES MBM-1
£569

3 The release of this affordable Matt Bellamy signature model earlier this year followed the Muse frontman's purchase of Manson Guitar Works in 2019. A collaboration with Cort, the Meta Series MBM-1 comes loaded with a killswitch and punchy high-output humbuckers, giving this powerful plug-in baby all the punch it needs for supermassive riffs.

GRETSCH G6120T-BSSMK BRIAN SETZER
£3,199

5 Few have pushed a Gretsch 6120 harder than Brian Setzer, and this Smoke Orange signature model is a painstaking tribute to the rockabilly legend's main stage guitar. Rolled fingerboard and body edges make it a smoother ride than most, while a pair of TV Jones Ray Butts Ful-Fidelity pickups provide a passport to vintage-style Gretsch tone. Addictively playable and achingly cool.

IBANEZ STEVE VAI PIA
£3,099

6 Launched at NAMM 2020, the PIA (Paradise In Art) is an interesting evolution of Vai's previous signature designs. Instead of the monkey grip, we get the more elegant Petal Grip, which is said to symbolise "unity, companionship, and interpersonal bonds". Loch Ness Green makes way for the more demure Envy Green and even the pickups have patterned covers. But don't fret: it's still a shred machine.

FENDER JIM ROOT JAZZMASTER V4
£1,139

7 The Slipknot star has made a cottage industry out of stripping back classic Fender shapes for metal purposes, and this latest offset is his crowning achievement. There's no tone control, no vibrato, and nowhere to put Nespresso pods. With a solid mahogany body, two of Root's EMG signature humbuckers and a 12-inch fingerboard radius, this is as devastatingly single-purpose as they come.

GIBSON SLASH LES PAUL STANDARD
£2,599

4 While scientists are presumably hard at work on time travel, Gibson and Slash have collaborated on a Les Paul-shaped portal back to the era of unapologetic rock stars and low-slung guitars that cry out to be plugged into a wall of Marshalls. With no weight relief, no belly carves and brash humbuckers, this is a guitar with old-school attitude – and it's all the better for it.

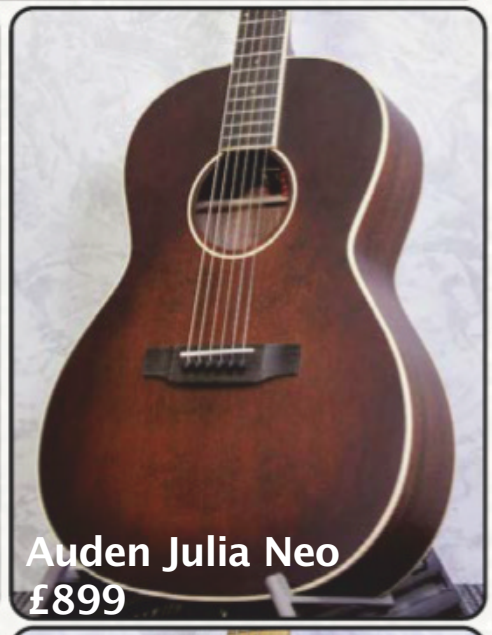
EPIPHONE JARED JAMES NICHOLS 'OLD GLORY' LES PAUL
£599

8 Based on the Wisconsin sensation's heavily modified Gibson of the same name, Jared James Nichols' signature Epiphone is stripped down and built for no-nonsense blues-rock. The single black P-90, wrapover bridge and custom plaque emblazoned with the rallying cry 'Blues Power' tell you everything you need to know: simply turn on, tune up and rock out like the man himself.

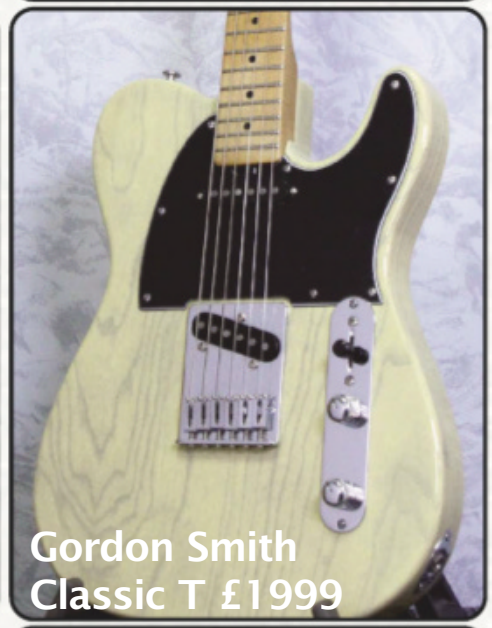
Forsyth
Est 1857

Highlights Of The Month

Atkin "The '38 Advanced" £3095


Auden Julia Neo £899

Eastman DT30 OM £2195


Gordon Smith Classic T £1999

Martin T1K tenor ukulele £579

Risa Soprano electric ukulele £395

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INDUSTRY INSIDER

FREDRIC EFFECTS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

With pedals hand-built in London by Tim Webster and his team, Fredric Effects has developed a strong reputation for custom enclosures and artwork, while offering coveted sounds usually only heard in Soviet-era preamps and obscure European guitars

How did you get into guitar?

"I started playing in bands pretty much as soon as I picked up a guitar. I was inspired by bands such as Sonic Youth, Hüsker Dü, Sleater Kinney, and Mission Of Burma. I had a few lessons but it was more a case of learning by doing. This probably explains my terrible technique! I'm also something of a collector of weird European guitars. I pick up pieces by brands like Hagström, Musima, Framus, and Jolana, as well as many others. I find that going outside of your comfort zone guitar-wise can often spark creativity."

When did you start building or tinkering with effects?

"Pretty soon after forming my first band, I began rewiring my guitar and swapping pickups. I used Lace Sensors, then single-coils. Most of my guitars still feature some variety of single-coil pickup in them, even now. Shortly after this, my dad built me a Screaming Bird clone for ear-splitting treble boost, which makes normal guitars sound clangy and abrasive, almost akin to an aluminium-necked guitar. Later on, I built myself some kits from BYOC and Musikding, by which point I had really caught the bug."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"I realised quite early on. I was working in a job doing web development but growing increasingly bored with it. I ran Fredric Effects on the side and, as they sold, I'd put the money back into increasingly larger batches of pedals. I was still drilling out enclosures by hand – which is something I definitely don't miss – and etching single-sided PCBs using ferric chloride. It was horrid stuff. But the pedals sold quickly and I was able to get a couple of local companies involved in enclosure fabrication and printing, and I managed to outsource the circuit boards too. After a couple of years of growing, the pedal business became my full-time job. It helped that shops such as Regent Sounds and Coda Music were quick to stock the brand and have been supportive ever since."

Did you have any external investment or support when you started out?

"No. It was just a matter of ploughing profits into the business and growing it gradually.

This also means it's more sustainable over the long term. Having a few different pedals means that, if there's a lull in sales for one of them, it's not the end of the world."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?
"I redesigned the logotype just over two years ago, and it now works better with the look of our pedals. Given the size of the range, there are a few different subsets: those with hand-drawn designs by illustrator Stacey Hine, some with photographic images, and others with simpler almost MXR-type labelling. Some of those I'm happiest with are the two East German-derived effects, the Verzerrer and Regent 150, which fit in a kind of sub-brand, Fredric Musikelektronik VEB. The VEB suffix is a jokey reference to the state-owned enterprises of the GDR."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?
"The Regent 150 has been a particular success, which is remarkable given that it's based on the preamp section of an obscure (if you weren't brought up in the 1970s or 1980s in the Eastern Bloc) solid-state amplifier. I thought the preamp of the Vermona Regent 150 amp had potential as a standalone guitar effect but was very pleasantly surprised by how well it works, and how unlike other EQ and boost pedals it is. Another of our other bestsellers is a clone of the Harmonic Percolator circuit. It uses the same hard-to-find components as the original 1970s effect and the expensive modern clone but has the kind of improved features people expect, like rotary knobs (the originals used sliders), DC jack, LED, small size and a diode selector switch."

What's your proudest moment as a maker so far?
"There have been a few, like when artists I rate use our effects, and when we get commissions to make batches of pedals for bands that I respect."

What's next for Fredric Effects?
"We plan to attend more guitar shows in Europe in the near future, so that we can show off our pedals to more people. As for product launches, there's the new Blue Monarch overdrive, which is based on the popular BB overdrive from the 1990s, and there's an analogue preamp plus cab-sim and headphone-amp combo that I'm designing primarily for home practice and recording use."

Find out more about Fredric Effects at fredric.co.uk

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ROBERT KEELEY
PEDAL MAKER

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

Many movers and shakers the world of guitar make a name for themselves by identifying a gap in the market and driving hard into it. For Robert Keeley, however, it was a love of audio electronics that lured him inescapably towards his calling

For Robert Keeley, it's always been about sound first and foremost. Having built a career chasing his fascination with electronics, he has become one of the world's more successful and most respected boutique pedal makers. Today, he oversees a 33-strong workforce (24 people in production alone) from his headquarters in Edmond, Oklahoma. To get here, however, he had to follow a long, winding and sometimes precipitous road.

Much of Keeley's youth was spent hopping around the US and around the globe, as his family followed his father, a captain in the US Air Force, as he moved from post to post. For four influential years during Keeley's teens, his family was based at Ramstein Air Base in Germany. Here, Keeley's obsessions grew – not only with guitar but with studio exploits too. Once he got his hands on a Fostex four-track cassette recorder, he became hooked on mastering the art of engineering, recording and overdubbing. But it was only after he'd experienced the allure of building and modifying circuits for himself that Keeley's focus was really redirected.

While wending his way through a seemingly endless trough of engineering-related educational endeavours – a year-long course in computer building and four years of junior college in electronics followed by four years earning a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering at the University of Oklahoma – Keeley was continually drawn back, time and again, to the same questions: how are these sounds made? How can I make them better?

SPARKING AN INTEREST

Like a lot of would-be whiz-kids, Keeley's first hands-on experience came courtesy of a simple electronics project. "The first spark of electronics in my world came when I made a flashlight in mid-1978 in upper Michigan," he says. "I'd use old paper towel rolls to band together the D cells. Getting the wires soldered between the batteries and light bulb was a never-ending struggle of burning fingers and bad connections that developed by the minute. There were broken wires the whole time."

That same year, a Yamaha student model acoustic guitar given to Keeley by his grandmother helped stir another obsession into the pot – the virtuosic playing of Yngwie Malmsteen, Edward Van Halen and Stevie Ray Vaughan helped too. Even amid the practical educational undertakings to follow, however, it would take some time for Keeley to turn the focus to designing and creating the effects that would one day carry his name.

Between his junior college and university courses, Keeley took a job at a stereo store, and spent his days installing and modifying car audio systems. He found it a more formative role than the position might imply. "Car stereos were amazing devices, with quad output systems, low-voltage supplies, high-current switching designs," he says. "There was a lot to learn that would help with effects pedal development." Applying this know-how to a senior design project at the University of Oklahoma, for which Keeley created a digitally controlled analogue delay and tuner, finally brought him in from the cold, and the die was cast.

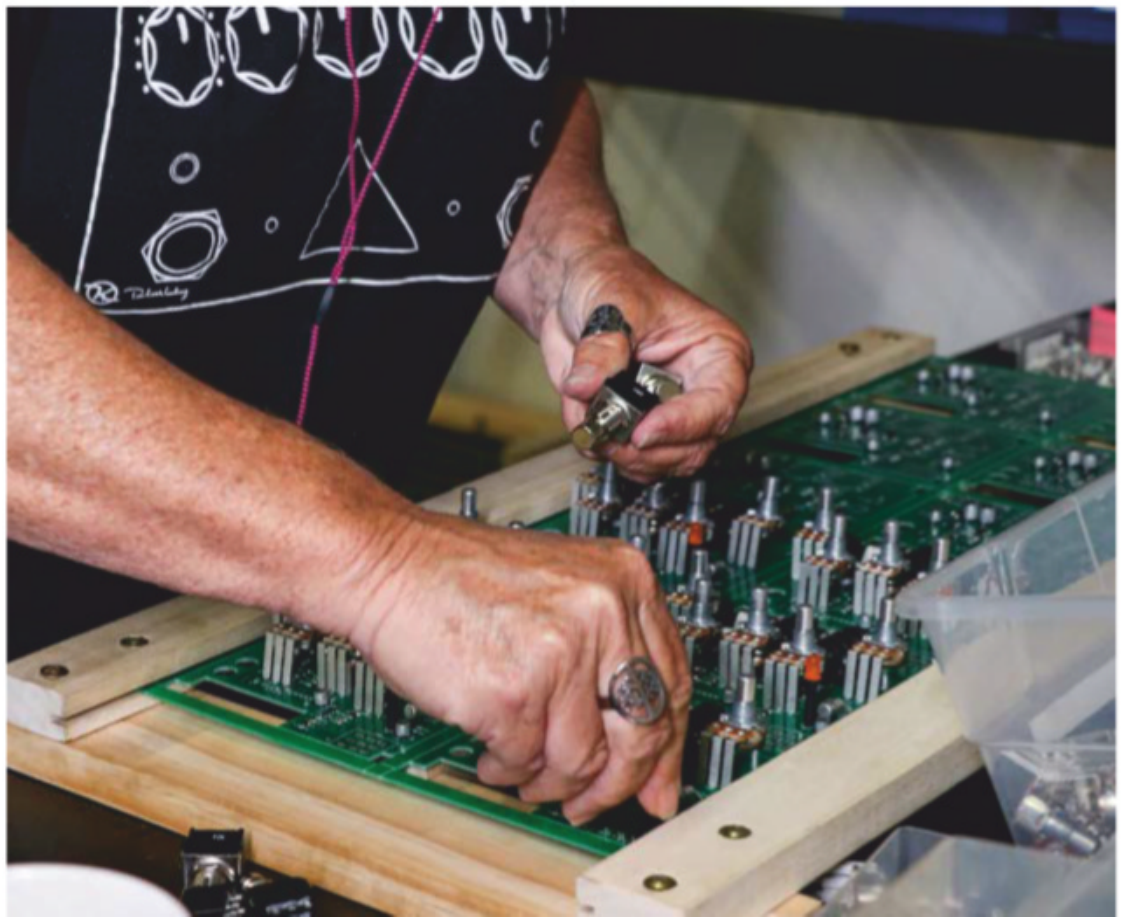
The business itself really came together when Keeley was working as an engineering professor at Vatterott College just outside Oklahoma City. One day he was teaching engineering systems, the next he was hiring his own students to help build the pedals that had taken off from his side gig. "The first [Keeley Compressor] went out September 2001," he says, "and I had quit my job as a professor at the college in May of 2002."

HOT-ROD MENTALITY

Part of what helped to get Keeley Electronics recognised early on was an infectious enthusiasm for repairing and modifying popular existing pedals. Carry out a cursory search online and you'll still see a secondhand market replete with Keeley-modded Ibanez Tube Screamers, Boss DS-1s and Vox wahs, as well as innumerable other Keeley-adapted classics. In 2014, though, the company ceased offering mods of old pedals from other makers in the wake of the rampant success of its own creations. Keeley himself, however, maintains a deep reverence for the classics, married to a hot-rod shop's fervour for upgrading and supercharging existing platforms to take them into new and exciting territory.

"We're essentially still doing the same thing with our own pedals", he says. "Big Muffs, Tube Screamers, RATs, the Line 6 DL4, the TC Electronic chorus and flange, and the Boss DD-3 – these are all still amazing sounds, and you can do a lot with the basic building blocks that hasn't been done before. I really want to combine sounds and effects, and switch into something that makes music creation fun and easy. I like improvised music. As we develop new things, we are always modding our old stuff, making it better, making it more toneful, more dynamic, responsive and free from noise."

To that end, and as much as he enjoys designing new creations, Keeley freely admits – as do most makers – that he owes a certain debt of gratitude to the classics, the icons, the pedals that laid the foundations for the majority of soundscapes out there. "You have to know the classics," he says. "Not many people are like Z.Vex and Joel Korte from Chase Bliss. Most folks have to build from something inspirational."



"CAR STEREOS WERE AMAZING DEVICES. THERE WAS A LOT TO LEARN THAT WOULD HELP WITH EFFECTS PEDAL DEVELOPMENT"

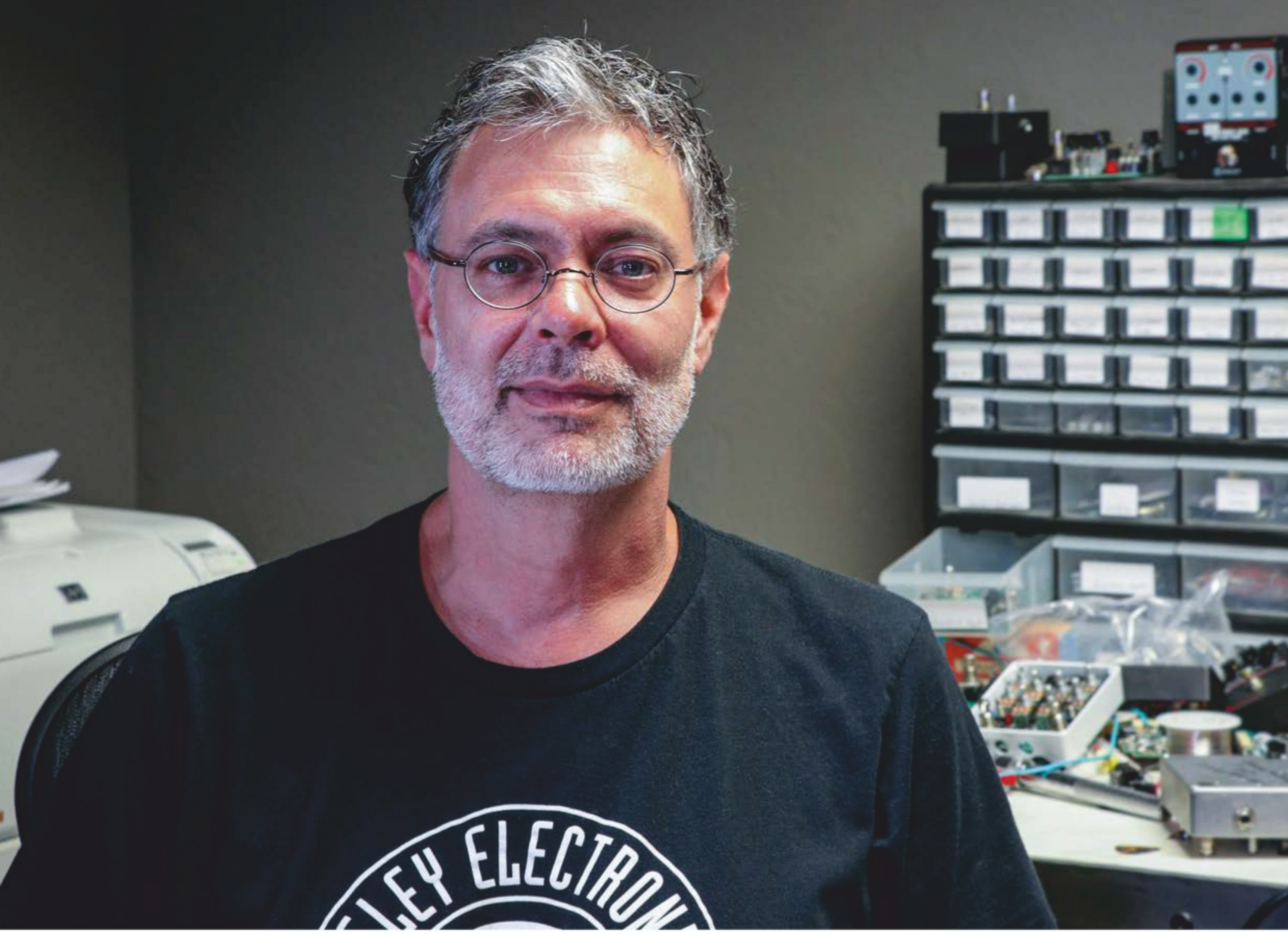
ABOVE The Keeley XVIII Phaser and Loomer ambient fuzz in eye-catching limited edition colourways

Part of what had drawn him to the market in the first place was the drive to mod and hot-rod effects that was such a prevalent part of the late 1990s and early 2000s boutique wave. It was at this point that players and small-shop makers had come to a solid re-appreciation of what the classics could do, and now wanted to push them to do something more.

"It felt like hot-rodding cars and car stereos to me," says Keeley. "I had a blast building a motor for a [Chevrolet] Camaro and adding nitrous, as well as all the suspension tricks one could do. Adding switches to pedals for more bass, more boost, more highs and more 'tone flow' was a natural extension of that. Home-stereo tube amplifier designs and other high-fidelity marvels influenced my mods and what I brought to the pedal world."

NO COMPROMISE

We might think of the compressor as the pedal that launched a thousand successes in the boutique effects industry – well, two or three at least – and several fledgling makers seemed to cruise by on the strengths of their own reimaginings of the fabled Ross Compressor in the late 1990s and early 2000s.



Keeley was preeminent among them. To get there, however, he developed what was far more than just another reboxed clone. His eponymous Keeley Compressor was his first production model, remains his most successful pedal to date, and is one design that has never been left to rest on its laurels.

"The compressor captured my ear from the moment I played the first one," he recalls. "To date, we have sold 80,000 of them over the past 18 years. My Katana design was very popular too. I'm proud of it because it is simply two JFET transistors. It's super simple but it sounds incredible." Said sound has won the Katana many fans, including John Mayer, who Keeley says has used it for at least 15 years.

"The Keeley Compressor has been such a rewarding pedal to build and grow with," he adds. "I'm fairly certain that it was the first pedal with a blue LED in 2001, which really set it off visually. Sonically, I made improvements to the Ross design as well, by using all metal film resistors and caps, and adding a recovery time control (which was accidentally called an attack time control) set it apart from other clones.

"The big change came three years ago when we released the Compressor Plus, which finally had a blend control and a tone control, what I call a 'treble-recovery circuit'. The tone control came from noise-reduction techniques I saw in Boss pedals. I modified it to work with frequencies that seem to be lost with the reduction in dynamics as a result of compression. I think it turned out really good-sounding. I couldn't be more pleased with the Compressor Plus as it stands now."

More recently, a new wave of designs has chalked up big sales for the company, with the Dark Side, the Caverns, and the D&M Drive having sold more than 10,000 units each over the past three years.

"My design team includes Craighton Hale and Aaron Tackett," says Keeley. "These guys make dreams happen. We have had great initial success in OEM work for other pedal companies too. This includes the board and surface mount production that Craighton set up, and the digital reverb algorithms that Aaron designed, which are used by other makers of guitar effects, including Ernie Ball, Milkman, Benson, JHS, and Chase Bliss."

WE CAN REBUILD HIM, WE CAN MAKE HIM BETTER

Though the pedal market has continued to explode over the past decade, it certainly wasn't under-supplied in the early 2000s when Keeley Electronics officially entered the race. What was it, then, that made the former engineering professor and audio enthusiast feel he could improve things?

"That's a central question that I ask on a daily, heck, an hourly basis: 'How can I do this a lot better?' That's how I design. How can I take a list of common complaints and build a mod that solves a problem? How can I combine certain sounds in ways they haven't been before, like the Monterey Fuzz and Rotary Vibe pedal? When I saw Dave Fox doing the Captain Coconut II, I was excited about combining those things. So when we developed our DSP skills, I was able to take an old-school Fuzz Face-style circuit and couple it with our DSP into a small stompbox."

That attitude persists with each new design that Keeley and his team turn out, along with a conscious effort to avoid taking their urges too far.

"Nowadays," he says, "the first considerations are how do we not over-design this and make it a mess. We've got so many ideas that we could implement. It's like we're at the whiteboard with design flow charts and block diagrams and lists trying to sort and clarify all the desires from me and my team."

Ultimately, this restraint has served them well and, as much as anything – stellar tone, creative designs, robust construction – Keeley Electronics has become known for pedals that do what they do effectively and efficiently, with little waste exhibited in novelty sounds or trivial functions. Along those lines, there's a recent pedal that Keeley is particularly proud of, which combines his inner dreamer and his inner pragmatist to form a golden ratio.

"I'm most proud of the Eccos lately," he says, regarding his highly functional delay/looper pedal. "It took many years for me and my guys to develop and it's a huge step up in our abilities and tone. It's a masterpiece to me. It does everything I could hope for and more. I'm also super-proud of things such as our 30ms and Bubbletron. Those were other rather unique ideas that brought something new to the effects world. I also dig our Monterey and Dark Side, which combine tones and functions in a way that I enjoy. They capture a set of soundscapes that are fun to paint with."

HORSES FOR COURSES

Although, like many upmarket makers today, Keeley bemoans the ebbing supplies of US and European-made parts, he doesn't waste time fretting over the loss. The key is to find the components that do work and to make the best effects you possibly can with what's available to you.

"Will I live long enough to see made-in-America electronic parts again?" he muses. "Probably not, but it sure would be nice. At any rate, we have had nice success in building our own circuit boards and understanding what types of parts and materials it takes to make a great-sounding low-noise device. I have the pickiest of ears listening to our designs, and we are constantly making things better."

Regarding the technology required to get them there, Keeley similarly refuses to remain locked in the philosophy that there's only one way to build a great-sounding pedal.

"In some senses the classics are the classics," he says. "If you want a germanium fuzz sound, you'd better use a germanium transistor. If you want octave up and down with reverse reverb, you're going to need DSP and a programmer that can listen to what artists hear and want, and turn that into a reality – and you're going to need the experience of someone who can create a four-layer circuit board."

"WE ARE ALWAYS MODDING OUR OLD STUFF, MAKING IT BETTER, MORE TONEFUL, MORE RESPONSIVE AND FREE FROM NOISE"

In the end, though, for Keeley it comes down to the basics. "You have to have high-quality parts and solid construction or the unit will fail and become noisy – or worse, it won't sound good to begin with."

Asked what the future holds, Keeley is animated. "Way too many things," he says. "My freaking world is packed. There are a couple of artist-related pedals. We just finished a crazy ring-mod-delay voice effect for Larry LaLonde of Primus. That opened up some vocal effect ideas for us.

"A new dual-drive series of pedals is on the design board too, kind of like the D&M, a series of three or four that go from mild to radically heavy. There's a wealth of ideas that we're planning for on the Eccos platform, something like a really toneful reverb with a freeze-type feature, perfect for end-of-pedalboard/signal chain sounds.

"There are OEM pedals that we're bringing to production too, and I've been working on Bluetooth and wifi ideas, combined with digi-pot ideas to control analogue effect parameters from phones. Something simple, like controlling my Tube Screamer-type mods from an app or Fuzz Face-type mods to a Hendrix-inspired effects workstation that you could control."

There are a few ideas in the pipeline, then… G

DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO SPRAY A 1950S-STYLE CHERRY SUNBURST FINISH

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Nothing beats the look of a late 1950s Les Paul Standard. Find out how to mix your own colours and spray your own sunburst using period-correct materials – without the need for specialist equipment

I first stripped and refinished this guitar a decade ago. It's a 1983 Greco Mint Collection made with a leftover Super Real neck that I bought as a husk back in the days when you could pick these up for about £300. It was my first attempt at a Burst-style refinish and, for a long time, I've felt that I could do a better job.

Having learnt a few new skills in the past few years, I'm going to take things a bit further. As I've had the opportunity to play numerous examples from the 1950s, my tastes have evolved. These days, I prefer tops with moderate curly figuring, and slim necks feel all wrong.

This time around, I'm veneering the top. The big challenge, though, is spraying a sunburst finish that looks closer to the Gibson examples of the 1950s. For this, I'll be demonstrating how you can mix and spray your own lacquer without having to buy specialist equipment.

STRIP DOWN

We're parachuting into this project at about the halfway point because I've covered many of these tasks before. In short, after stripping the finish using Nitromors, I remove the body binding and separate the fretboard from the neck to glue veneer onto the back of the 'board and increase the depth of the neck. If you want to learn more about this, check out my Goldtop and Gretsch Anniversary conversion projects on *Guitar.com*.

I learnt how to veneer a curved surface using a vacuum press when I was restoring my Gretsch. Later, I did it myself, using a vacuum storage bag when I needed to conceal the inlays and filled post holes on my Goldtop conversion. The difference with both those guitars is that they are veneered with single pieces. For a Burst-style top, however, I need bookmatched veneer.

Some people do this by cutting the veneer to compensate for the curvature but that strikes me as very challenging and possibly beyond my woodworking abilities. Instead, I decide to test the hypothesis that glued joints are actually stronger than wood fibres, and join the veneer pieces before gluing them onto the guitar.

The veneer I'm using came from eBay. It's a surprisingly good source for materials of this sort and, after searching for 'figured maple veneer', I chose the one I liked best. Although the veneer is only about 0.4mm thick, I approach joining the two pieces just as I would acoustic guitar back plates.

1

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The veneer pieces are placed one on top of the other, aligned as closely as possible and clamped to a shooting board. I retract the blade on my longest plane, attach 320 grit paper using double-sided tape, and then true up the edges with the plane laying on its side.

Conventional clamps are not an option for joining veneer sheets. Instead, I butt the pieces up against each other, elevate one of the outer edges by a few millimetres and fix 10cm strips of masking tape across both. With one piece elevated, it creates a gap beneath the strips of tape and, when they're both laid flat, the masking tape actually becomes too short and its elasticity pulls the pieces together.

The veneer pieces are opened out so I can apply Titebond Original glue. With such thin pieces of wood, it's delicate work. I quickly lay the veneer sheets down on a flat board, with plastic packing tape under the join so the veneer won't stick to the surface and the masking tape strips on the underside.

1 Bookmatched sheets of curly maple veneer must be glued together before being fixed onto the body

2 The yellow masking tape strengthens the edges and the pale masking tape is fixed across the centre join before the body goes into the vacuum press

3 Cascamite glue proves a good choice and the centre join thankfully survives the process intact

4 The veneer is trimmed and the holes re-established to ready the body for binding and final sanding

As I press the pieces flat, the masking tape pulls them together. I carefully inspect the join line to ensure the pieces are well aligned, then place a flat piece of wood – again protected with plastic tape – over the join. This is clamped down to ensure the veneer remains as flat as possible. When I remove the clamps and the masking tape, the result is almost perfect and I sand out any areas where there is misalignment.

Having learnt a lot from veneering my Goldtop, I ensure there is minimal overhang and strengthen the edges with masking tape to prevent the veneer from cracking around the edge of the binding channel. I also apply fresh strips of tape across the join line as insurance against the veneer pulling apart Having been unimpressed with Cold Press Veneer glue, I apply Cascamite with a roller. After 24 hours in the vacuum press, the veneer is bonded to the top.

BACK TOGETHER

I clean up the veneer edges with a sharp chisel, remove any remaining residue from the binding channel and glue on the new binding. Finding off-white binding of the correct thickness for Grecos of this type is no easy task. I get mine from Eurospruce (eurospruce.de) and it bends quite easily when heated.

Fresh fretboard binding is required due to the increased neck depth, and I sacrifice a plastic tortoiseshell pick to make the side dots before the fretboard is glued back onto the neck – once the top veneer has been sanded level with the mahogany neck extension.

After the body and neck have been sanded, I reinstate the ground wire and tailpiece bushings, make a new nylon nut and put the guitar back together to test that everything is working properly before I go on to apply the finish. I also prefer to finesse the neck profile with the guitar strung up, using templates I've taken from various 1950s Les Pauls.

SEEING RED

Gibson used red grain filler for 1950s Bursts and I decide to try Dartfords Thixotropic in cherry red. Grain filling is a messy and tedious process but this stuff goes on and cleans up so nicely that it's a pleasure regardless. After leaving it overnight, it sands easily too.

Applying the filler onto bare wood also stains the mahogany, so the neck, binding and front of the body need to be masked off and protected before application. After sanding and wiping the body down with tack cloth, I remove all the masking tape, level the areas where the filler is raised adjacent to the tape lines, then apply fresh masking tape and protection for the front.

I start with a couple of mist coats of clear lacquer, and follow up with a couple of heavy coats of sanding sealer. These are flatted back with 320 grit paper to achieve a level surface before spraying colour coats.

Using Manchester Guitar Tech's aniline cherry lacquer (manchesterguitartech.co.uk), I spray the neck and body with three coats. I'm pleased with the colour but next time I might add a bit of black to the red grain filler to darken it slightly.

Judging by my grain filler and lacquer tests on a scrap piece of mahogany, I'm confident it will look even better when some tinted clear coats are sprayed on top. I remove all the masking tape and the plastic that's been protecting the binding and the front, and sand off any overspray.

5 The binding has to be heated to bend around the cutaway and horn, with tape and surgical tubing holding it in position as the binding cement dries

6 Dartford's Thixotropic cherry red grain filler needs to be applied to before spraying because mahogany is an open-pore wood

7 After grain filling, it's important to clean stray bits of filler off the binding

8 The contrast between the sprayed masking tape and the clean piece shows how much aniline red has been sprayed onto the body and neck

9 The Preval sprayer is used for the aniline yellow and the airbrush is used for shading the edges and applying the aniline red

BEGINNING TO BURST

Aniline dye's tendency to fade is central to my strategy of trying to make the sunburst look more like a vintage finish this time around. First though, I need to mask off every part of the body that isn't maple. Spraying begins with a couple of sealer coats that are sanded to ensure that the surface is perfectly flat.

From what I can establish, Gibson sprayed aniline yellow – but here's where things get complicated. Nobody sells aniline yellow lacquer in aerosols, so I'm going to be mixing my own. The issue is, how can you spray lacquer that you've tinted yourself unless you have a spray gun and compressor?

Fortunately, there are two solutions that are both cheap and easy. The first is to buy a modelling airbrush and a tin of airbrush propellant – the cost of which should not exceed £30. The second is a Preval sprayer, which is basically an aerosol that screws onto a plastic vessel containing your lacquer. This allows you to buy tins or bottles of clear or coloured lacquer, and replacement aerosol canisters are available separately. My Preval units come from morelli.co.uk and cost £6.48 each. The plan is to spray the sunburst colours using these devices and spray the clear gloss coats using Manchester Guitar Tech's clear gloss aerosols as usual.

DYEING TO KNOW

Alcohol-soluble yellow aniline dye powder arrives from touchstonetonewoods.co.uk, ready to be dissolved and mixed into the clear lacquer. I use isopropyl alcohol with a dash of acetone to aid the process. The powder dissolves almost instantaneously, then it's filtered through a 190-micron paint strainer as it's added to clear lacquer. They look a bit like paper coffee filters and cost about 10p a pop on eBay.

The quantity of alcohol/acetone used to dissolve the dye should count as a part of your thinner mix. So, when cellulose thinners are added to the lacquer for spraying, you'll need less than usual. A lacquer to thinners/solvent ratio of about 60:40 should be fine.

After spraying some test pieces with the aniline yellow, the results are closer to Gibson yellow than off-the-shelf amber or tinted clear. It really makes the grain pop and boasts a properly distinct golden hue, so I mask off everything that isn't maple and use the Preval to cover up the top. A couple of coats produces a strong yellow, and I'm banking on it toning down with a blend of fading and darkened top coats.

IN THE SHADE

The next bit may surprise you. I apply a touch of edge shading before the red. For this, I mix blue, medium brown and a hint of black into some cellulose thinners. It ends up a sort of RAF blue/grey, and I add gloss cellulose in a 50:50 ratio so thatI can spray it with the airbrush. This allows me to apply a little at a time to achieve a greenish-grey shadow around the edges, and the resulting 'unburst' immediately makes the aniline yellow look mellower.

For the aniline red part of the bursting process, I try the cherry I used on the mahogany over some maple veneer offcuts I have previously sprayed with the yellow and blue/black shading. I find it a little too dark, and the aerosol's tendency to spit could prove disastrous. Instead, I try some pre-mixed aniline red from Eurospruce and, when I spray it over the maple veneer, it looks about right.

10 After achieving a level surface with cellulose sanding sealer, the bursting process begins with two coats of aniline yellow

11 Blue, brown and black are mixed to apply a shading coat around the edges, resulting in a greenish-grey shadow

12 The airbrush is perfect for applying the aniline red because its fine atomisation creates a smooth transition and it's easy to direct the lacquer exactly where you want it

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11

To get a really smooth transition from yellow to red, you need good atomisation. This means that the tinted lacquer exits as a very fine mist rather than larger droplets. My airbrush has better atomisation than aerosols and the Preval system, so that's what I use here.

Colour depth and shade can vary dramatically as lacquer dries, and your perception will vary according to lighting conditions. My advice is to spray a little at a time and build the burst up gradually. So long as the lacquer is stored in an airtight container, it will keep. Plus, there's no need to spray the whole burst in one go, especially if you're new to this.

It may seem convoluted and unnecessary to mix your own colours but doing so means that you should be able to get the exact look you want – albeit with a little practice. From a technical perspective, I'm reasonably pleased with this sunburst. But it's admittedly odd to intentionally spray a 'burst that I don't particularly like in the expectation – or hope – that natural processes will transform it into the finish that I really want.

Some binding scraping and heavy coats of clear gloss bring this part of the process to a close. In the final instalment of this project, we'll discover if the aniline dye really does fade and how the overall aesthetic can be fine-tuned using a very special tinted lacquer that you can make yourself. I'll also be doing some relic'ing before reassembling, so check in soon to see the completed guitar. G

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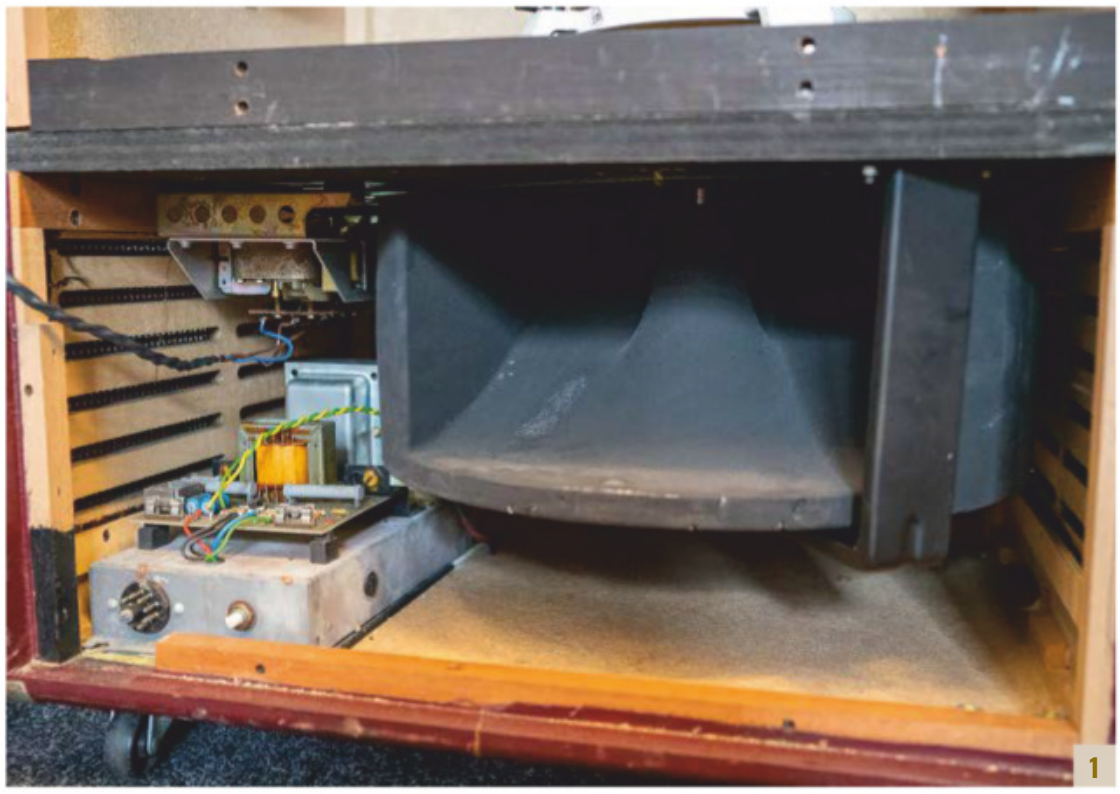
AMPLIFIER FAQ

This month, Rift boss Chris Fantana helps you untangle the head-spinning world of rotating speaker cabinets

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



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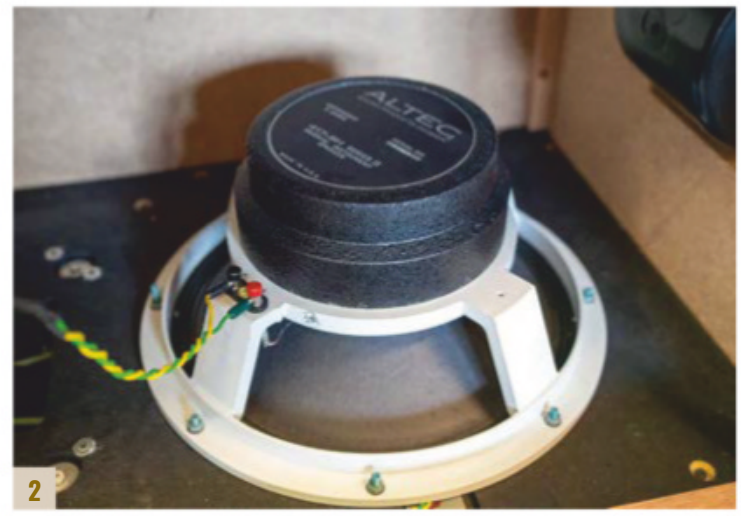

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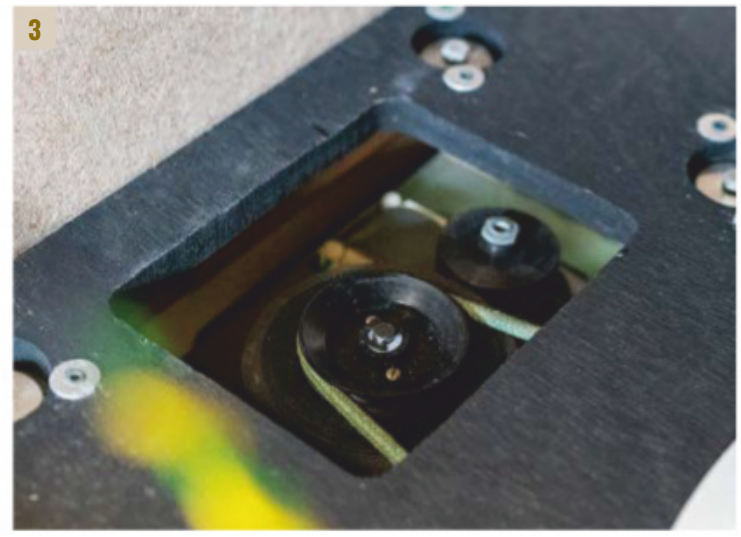

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1 Removing the Sonorous 601's rear panel reveals both the rotating drum and the onboard solid-state amplifier

2 The cabinet is loaded with an Altec 418-8H 150w eight-ohm speaker with a three-inch voice coil

3 The two-speed motor can been seen through an access hole in the speaker baffle

Can you explain what a Leslie cabinet is? I've been offered one for sale but I'm not sure if I can use it with my guitar amplifier.
ADRIAN, ABERDEEN

Hi, Adrian. The Leslie speaker is a separate amplifier and loudspeaker unit named after its inventor Donald Leslie. In the late 1930s, he started work on a device that would deliver the sound of a pipe organ better than his current setup. The story goes that while working as a radio service engineer in LA, he bought a Hammond organ from his then place of employment, Barker Brothers department store. He hoped that it would be a suitable substitute for a pipe organ but upon setting it up at his home, he quickly realised that it didn't quite hit the mark. Being an engineer, he started development on a speaker cabinet that would give him the sound he was looking for.

After going through various prototypes, he discovered that he needed to make a moving speaker to emulate the spatially varied sound of a pipe organ, which comes as a result of the different locations of its pipes. His solution was unique and innovative: rather than rotating the speaker itself, he fixed it in position and then had a rotating drum below that sent the sound waves out at different positions as it spun.

The basic design hasn't changed much since then. The cabinet contained both an amplifier to which you'd connect your organ, and a two-speed motor that was used to set the rotational speed of the drum. The speed variations were referred to as chorale and tremolo.

A customer of mine recently bought a Sonorous 601 Leslie copy by Boosey & Hawkes. He asked me to convert the unit for use with his 1970s Fender Super Reverb, as a plug-and-play solution. Aesthetics aside, the fundamental design of the Sonorous is remarkably similar to that of the original Leslie. Removing the lower rear panel reveals a solid-state amplifier on the lower left of the cabinet, and the huge black rotating polystyrene drum within. Behind the upper panel is the 12-inch Altec speaker, and you can see the speed motor through a small cutout.

For conversion for passive guitar use, we must first remove the amplifier unit from the cabinet. We'll be connecting directly to the speaker, so the amplifier is now redundant. Two screws hold it in place and, after desoldering the connecting wires, we can remove it gently, taking care to not damage the drum. Once it's out of the way, we can remove the speaker, motor, and drum as a whole unit.

It's not a single motor that drives the drum but two separate units that engage the drive mechanism. They are both powered by 240v AC and one or the other is selected by a footswitch connected to the amplifier unit. One unit spins the drum at twice the speed of the other, which is how the speeds are controlled.

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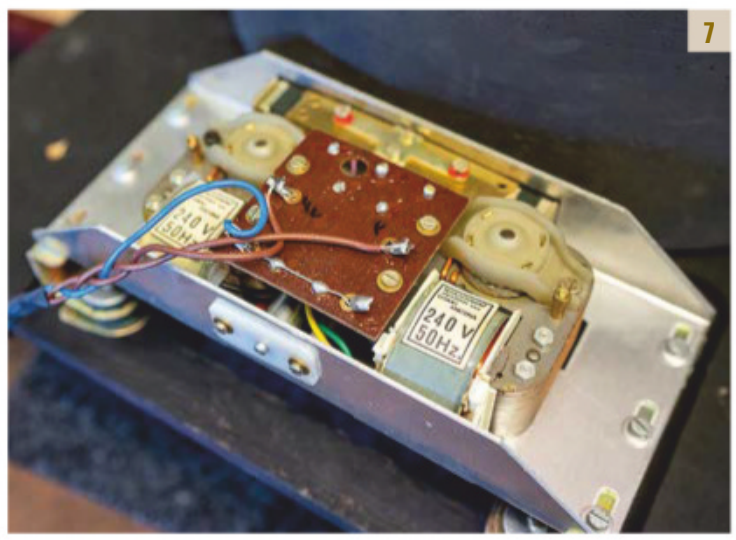

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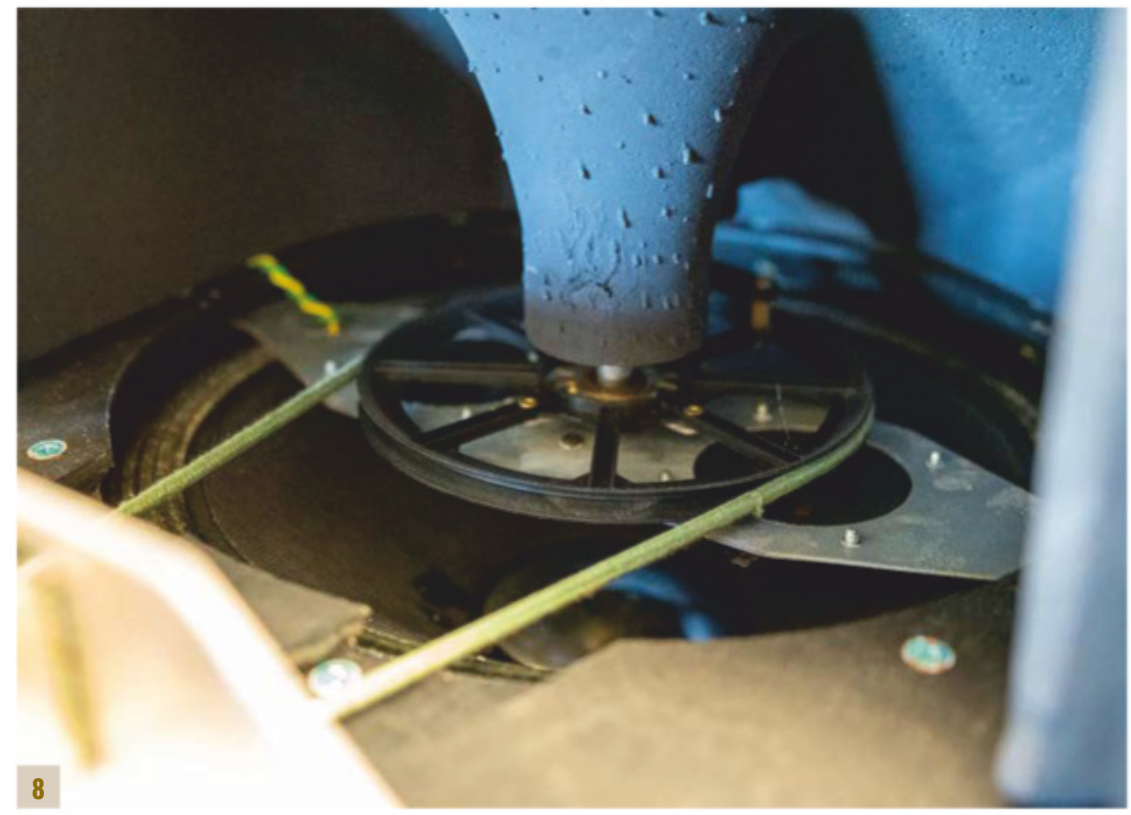

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For our conversion, running 240v mains voltage down a footswitch cable is an absolute no-no so, short of major modification to the motor unit or designing a clever new switching unit, we'll have to keep everything onboard. After running through the options with the customer, we decide to omit the footswitch and have the two speeds selectable by a toggle switch on the rear of the cabinet.

We cut a new lower rear panel from 9mm MDF and paint it black to match the original look. We fit a combined IEC/fuse/power switch unit and our separate speed switch, before wiring it up and connecting to the speed motor. A quick test proves that it works and, crucially, it's safe to operate.

We add a Marshall-style speaker socket to the upper panel and connect that directly to the Altec speaker, which is exactly how it would be wired in a regular 1x12 cabinet. Leslie-style cabinets also have tweeter horns to separate the upper and lower frequencies. In this application, we've disconnected them but kept the wiring loom in place in case we decide to add them back in at some point.

Now it's time to reassemble and have a listen. We connect a Rift PR18 directly to the cabinet and, with the motor turned off, it sounds just like a regular cab. The bottom-end is perhaps a smidge overpowering but a quick tweak of the bass control balances everything out. With the speed motor turned on and the speed switch set to chorale (slow), the drum starts to rotate and we're treated to that classic Leslie feel that you only get with a real rotating drum.

The sound is being bounced around the room and the reflections cause some very pleasing phasing issues. This in-the-room 3D effect is not something I've heard from a pedal before – the laws of physics simply won't allow it!

Switching to the tremolo (fast) setting, the effect is not only faster but also more intense. You get a huge, powerful sound and it's no wonder that Donald Leslie spent years chasing it down. It's just wonderful.

The great thing about this cabinet is that my customer can run it in parallel with the internal speakers in the Super Reverb too, so he can retain more of the original tone if he wants.

There we have it, the Leslie cabinet explained. Yours might require some modification to work with your guitar amplifier, but boy is it worth it. G

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of British-built boutique amplifiers

4 Chris fitted a Marshall-style jack socket to the upper rear panel to allow quick connection to an amp

5 The combined IEC/power switch sits below the two-position speed toggle

6 The Sonorous 601 was made by Boosey & Hawkes in 1977. There was also a larger model, the 602, which featured two speakers and two rotating drums, one for treble, the other for bass

7 The drum speed motors are powered directly by 240v mains power

8 The string that runs the drum-drive system is still in fine shape on this Sonorous

1 You'll need a roll of copper tape, a sharp razor or box cutter blade, and a multimeter

2 After cutting a length of tape, trace the outline of the rout with your finger, leaving an impression you can follow with your razor blade

3 Cut out the rough shape of the cavity. This piece will partially cover the bottom of the rout

4 Test-fit the tape

5 Peel the tape away from its backing and carefully apply it

1

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5

TECH TALK

HOW TO SHIELD YOUR GUITAR

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

Is your beloved single-coil electric plagued by noise? We can help…

Whether it's practising in your bedroom or playing a live show (remember those?) noisy guitars can ruin an otherwise good time. Guitarists who prefer the sultry sounds of single-coil pickups often grin and bear it, accepting some noise in the trade-off for tone. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Shielding your guitar can greatly reduce the interference that plagues traditional Strats, Teles, Jaguars and Jazzmasters. In this month's column, I'll walk you through my process for shielding guitars and offer some tips on getting a clean look and optimal results.

AGENTS OF SHIELDING

Here's what you'll need to get started:

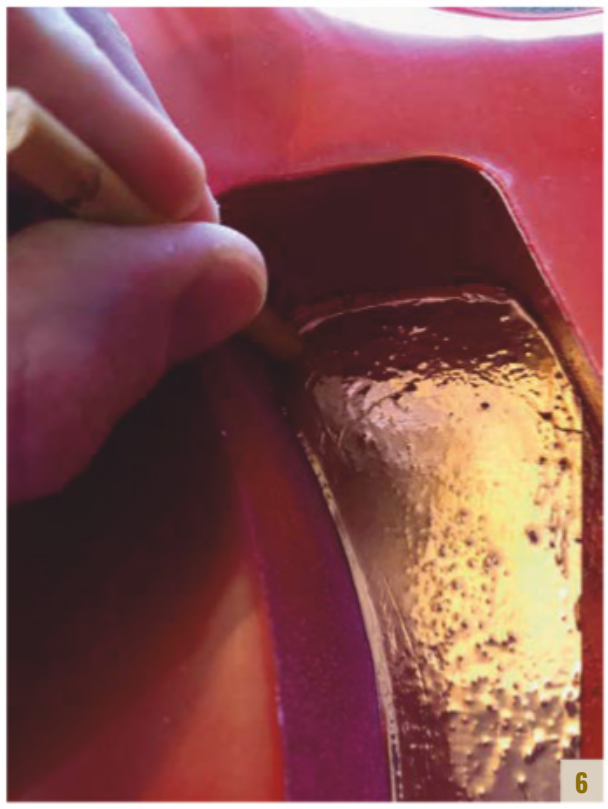
■ Foil tape of your choosing – the most commonly used varieties are copper and aluminium. While copper is indeed the better conductor, it also carries an increased price per metre. Aluminium is only slightly weaker for guitar shielding purposes but it's both cheaper and more plentiful, making it a more accessible option. Whichever you opt for, ensure that the tape has conductive adhesive so that you don't have to worry so much about the connection between overlapping pieces of tape.

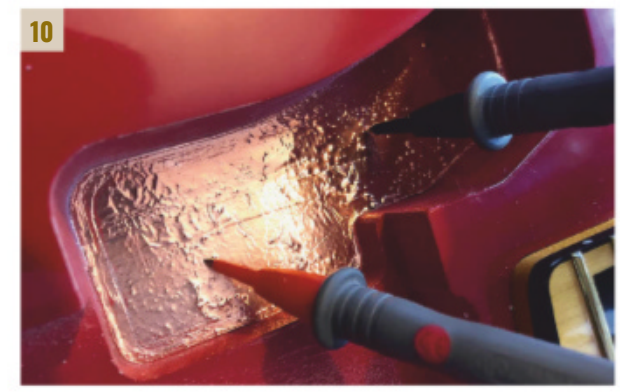
■ A fresh and sharp razor blade or hobby knife. This is essential for this kind of work. You'll be slicing through thin bits of metal, which will eventually dull the blade. You'll also be cutting a lot of different shapes and curves into the tape, and a sharp edge will make that task considerably easier.

■ A multimeter is vital for checking for continuity during the procedure. To do the job properly, each piece of foil you lay down must be electrically conductive with every other piece. A multimeter will allow you to check this, and will helps you work out where changes might be needed.

■ I also like to keep a piece of scrap dowel rod around to help me work out any air bubbles and lay down foil in the corners of the body routs.

Assuming you have everything you need to get started, and the space and time to properly complete a procedure like this one, let's get into it.





6 Use a spare bit of dowel to smooth down the corners

7 Use the same method to approximate the shape of the next section

8 Test-fit the second piece of tape for the bottom of the rout

9 Peel, apply and smooth out for a perfect fit

10 Use your multimeter to check for electrical continuity between the two pieces. If you hear a beep, that means they're connected

11 You can't hear this but trust me, it's beeping

SHAPE SHIFTING

I like to begin by lining the bottoms of the body cavities first, then taking care of the walls after. First, I unroll an appropriate amount of tape and measure it against the area I'm working with, in this case the rhythm circuit rout of a Jazzmaster body. I then cut it to length with my razor and set aside the roll.

Next, I lay that piece of foil on top of the section of the body I want to cover, and gently trace the shape of the rout with the tip of my finger. It doesn't take much pressure to leave an impression in the foil, and doing so gives me a pattern of the bottom of the rout.

After that, I use the tip of my razor to cut out the pattern I've made, making sure to trace outside the lines so that it's a little larger than necessary. It doesn't have to be perfect but it should adequately cover the surface of the body cavity. Take the extra time to really nail the curves for a clean fit and, as always, be careful when using any kind of sharp blade.

After the shape is cut out, I like to test the fit while the paper backing is still on the foil. This allows me to make adjustments to the shape before committing the tape to its final position.

When you're satisfied with the fit and placement, go ahead and peel the backing from the foil. I find that peeling the backing instead of the foil prevents it from curling up, which can make things tricky when you're trying to lay it down smoothly. Always try to work the backing away from the foil rather than vice versa.

Now it's time to press the tape flat in the bottom of the cavity. I like to adhere the tape to one corner first, then work my way to the other side, paying attention to any air pockets that may have formed along the way. Be mindful of any shelves or odd cutouts that may exist at the bottom of the rout that don't quite match what you traced earlier, as is the case on this body.

Once it's all down and flat, I go over the edges of the cavity with my wooden dowel rod to make sure it's pressed down neatly. It's also a good idea to go over the entire area with the rod for a smooth, clean look.

You'll notice that my first piece didn't quite cover the bottom of the rout, and that's perfectly okay. I wasn't convinced that a single piece would give me full coverage, so I used two instead. I went through the entire process again for the next piece, making sure that the bits that overlapped with the first piece were secured well and cleanly applied.

Once you have two pieces installed, it's a good idea to take a moment to check continuity, lest you have to double back later and redo an entire previous section. For this, I turn on my multimeter and set it to continuity, which on this meter looks like a little arrow pointing to an uppercase T laying on its side.

To check continuity, take the two included probes and place one on one piece of foil, and one on the other. Most meters will beep when they're electrically conductive, letting you know you did the job right. If there's no beep, check your work again.

12

12 Test-fit a length of tape against the walls of the Rhythm Circuit cavity

13

13 Peel the tape from its backing and apply carefully

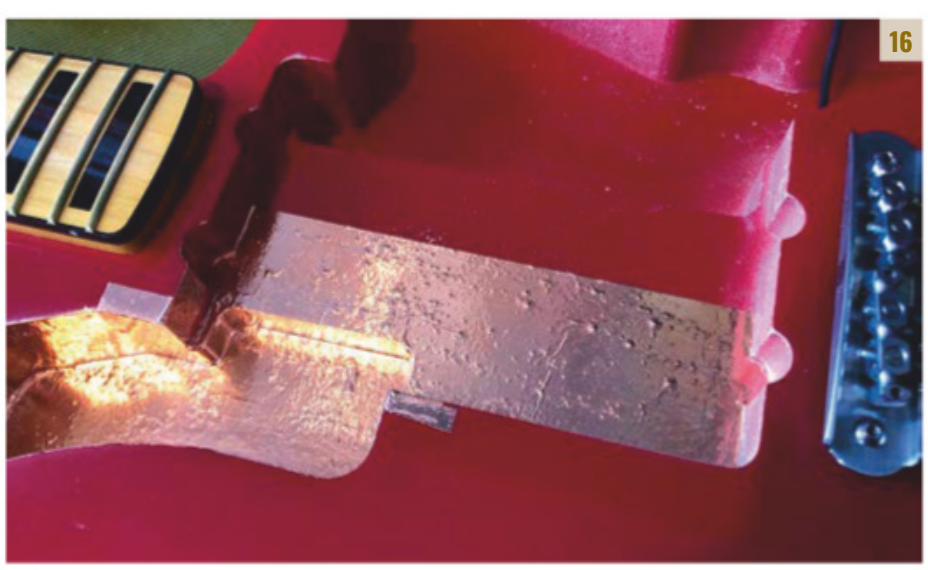
14

14 Trim any excess copper foil with a sharp blade

15

15 Leave small overhanging tabs to make contact with the foil that will later be applied to the scratchplate

16 Begin work on the swimming pool rout. Note: this is an aftermarket body; the routing pattern is very different to what you'll see on a Fender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17 The finished product. Take the time to apply foil cleanly and efficiently, both for noise reduction as well as the visual awe that comes with a meticulous shielding job

WALL CRAWLING

Let's move onto the walls of the rout. I start by once again cutting out a length of tape that matches the sides of the rout. I usually try to use a single piece if I can but, realistically, it's best to use two or three to make things easier on yourself.

No matter the number of pieces, I test the fit against the rout itself, putting the tape vertically in place and gently pressing it against the wall with my finger to see how it conforms to the curves and angles.

After test-fitting as before, I peel the backing off the tape and insert the foil into the rout, and, moving from one end to the other, use my finger to press it into shape, making sure the adhesive is sticking properly. Working my way around the cavity walls, I encourage the tape to conform to the rout. Don't worry if the tape is too tall for the rout, we'll be trimming that next.

Using my blade, I trace around the lip of the rout, lancing off the excess tape sticking up out of the cavity. It's a good idea to note where the scratchplate screws will be located on the body, because you'll want to leave some foil to hang over the lip and onto the face of the body to make contact with foil placed on the back of the plate. I choose pickguard screw locations for this because I know there will be a tight fit.

Once again, I smooth it all out with a dowel, using the length of it to work out air bubbles that might have become trapped under the foil. Using my multimeter, I check continuity between the tape on the walls and that on the bottom of the cavity. If everything's good, move on to the next area.

Certain routing templates are more complicated to line than others but work slowly and carefully and I'm sure you'll end up with a clean finish. I've seen far too many balled-up bits of foil shorting out pickups over the years, so if you're taking the time to do this correctly, I applaud and thank you.

All in all, this came out great, although I did have to make some small patches for the portions of the routs that aren't exactly standard for Jazzmasters. However, it all checks out for continuity, so I'm happy.

I mentioned foil on the scratchplate but, sadly, the guard is still in transit at the time of writing, so I can't show you how to do that yet. Until next time, then... Stay safe!

Follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen

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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **JOHN MAYER**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

He's one of the most imitated and highly regarded guitarists of the modern era, but Mayer's style is unabashedly inspired by the greats

John Mayer's arrival on the guitar scene at the turn of the century was greeted with some suspicion by the powers that be. What was a guy with Hollywood looks, a stable of pop songs and a boatload of SRV-inspired licks going to do to drive the instrument forward?

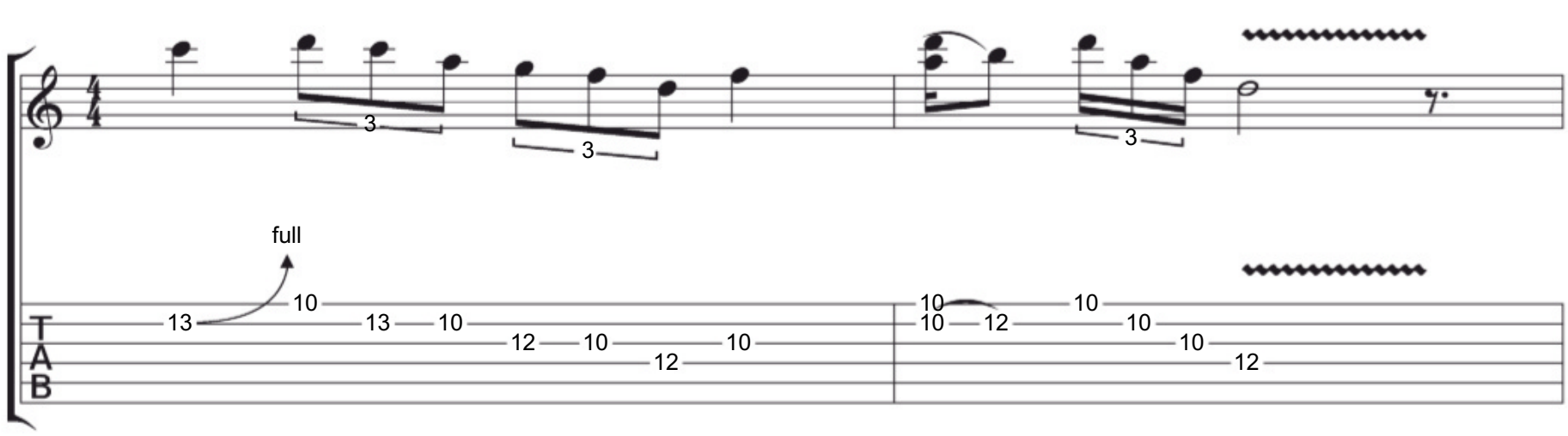
The answer, of course, was a hell of a lot. Two decades later, Mayer is a now bona fide guitar hero, one of the most respected players on the planet, and a multi-platinum artist whose style and gear choices have inspired a whole generation of varied and exciting new guitarists.

The fundamentals of Mayer's playing style remain rooted in the blues, and he has always worn his veneration of the greats – Stevie Ray Vaughan, BB King, Eric Clapton and Buddy Guy in particular – on his rolled-up sleeves. But the way he brings all these influences together in such a wonderfully expressive and fluid style is what sets him apart, and makes him a true idol of modern blues guitar.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea, UK. He has taught hundreds of students face to face and via the MGR Music platform. He has more than 10 years of experience working in the industry as a musician, session guitarist and teacher.

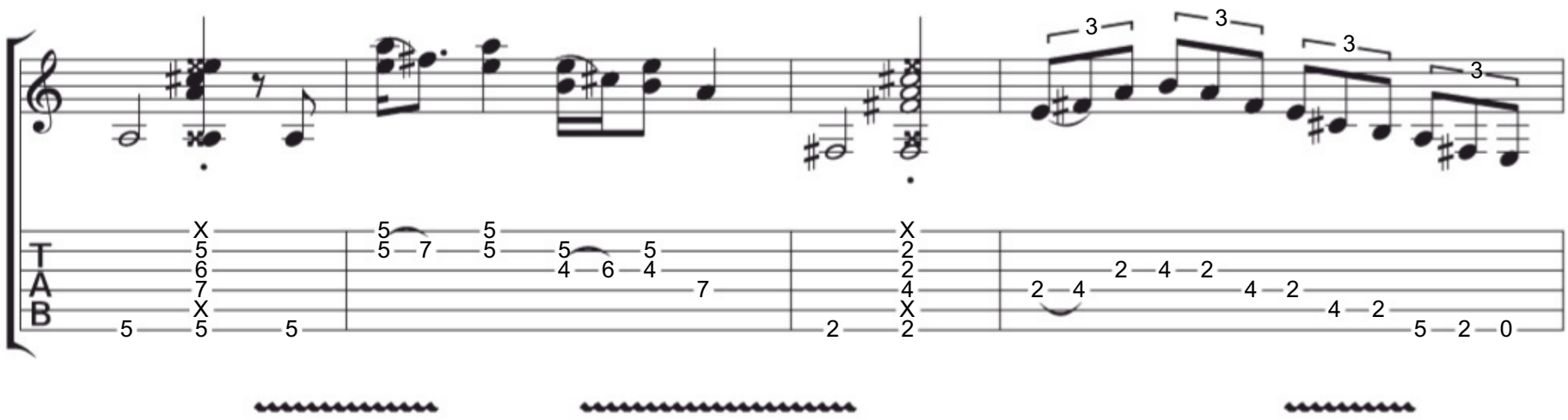
LICK 1

This is a bluesy pentatonic lick in the key of D minor. The first bar is a simple run, starting with a string bend before launching into descending triplets. In the second bar, there is a raked Dm chord. Don't focus too much on the 10th fret barred notes. If they don't ring out that's okay – you can even mute these if you wish. Mayer uses a lot of raked notes to increase the impact of the note he ends up on. Here, it's to emphasise the final note of the lick.



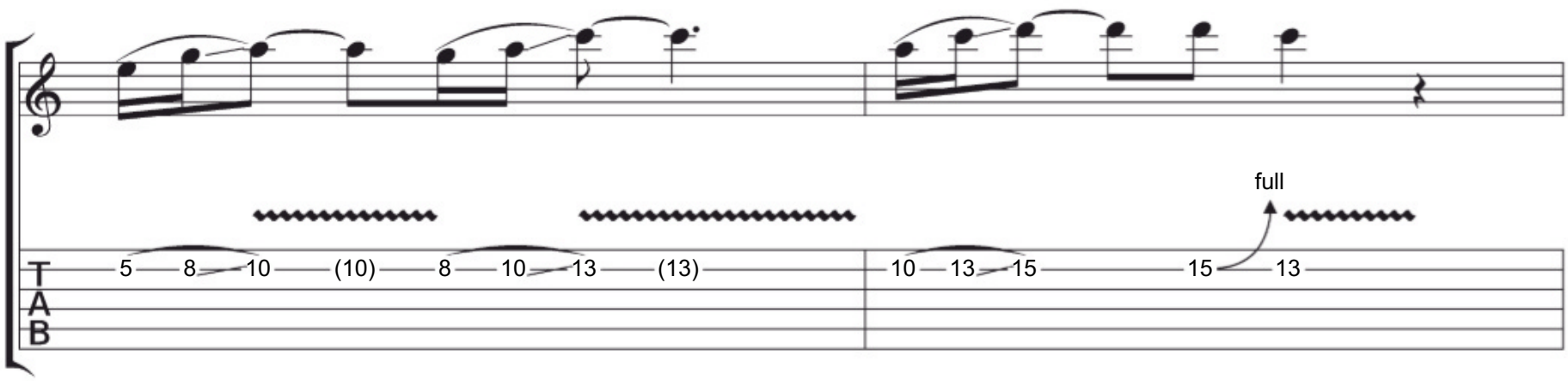
LICK 2

As a Hendrix devotee, Mayer often mixes rhythmic playing with lead lines, mostly to complement whatever vocal melody he might be laying down on top. This example is made up of two chords, an A major and an F# minor. They aren't played like conventional barre chords. The root on the low E is played with the thumb, and three notes in the form of a triad are played on the D, G and B strings. This method of approaching chords frees up other fingers for embellishments. The final bar is a speedy triplet run that would take you back to the A chord on the repeat.



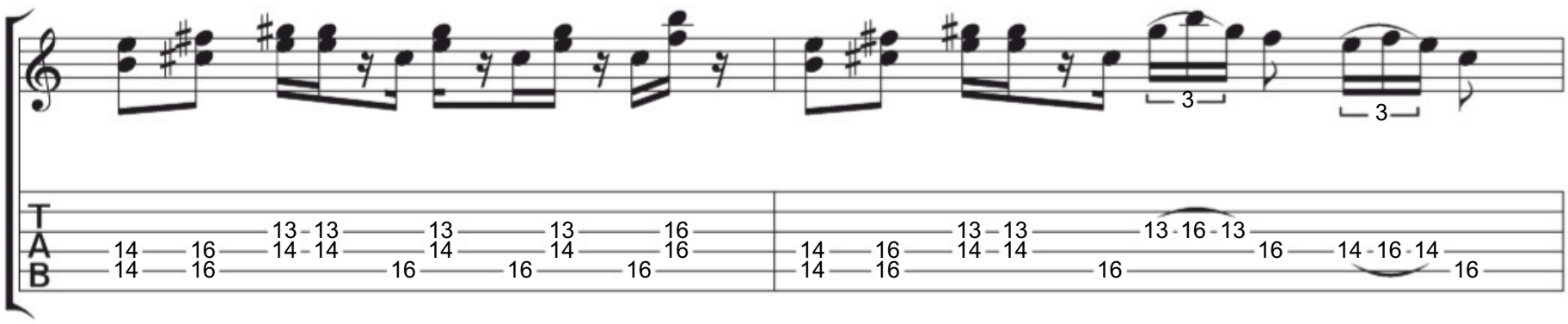
LICK 3

Aside from having fantastic blues chops, you may also see Mayer playing melodic phrases along one string. This is in part to emulate some of his slide guitar heroes. This lick pairs a hammer-on and a slide in each three-note grouping as you ascend the neck in the key of A minor. Leave some space between each grouping to allow the phrase to breathe – and don't forget your vibrato. There may not be many notes here but they really need to sing.



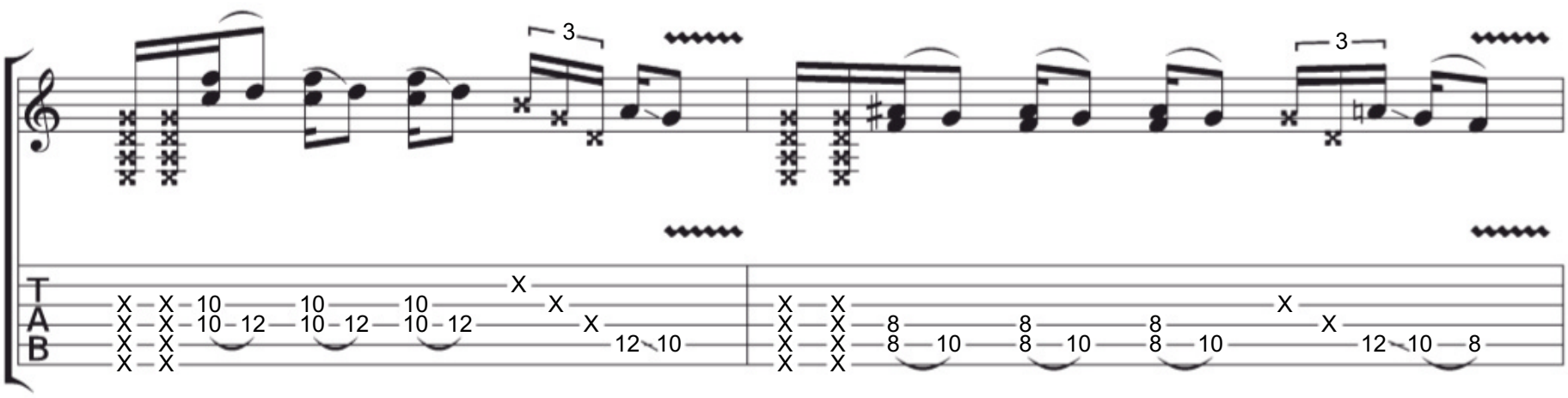
LICK 4

This funky riff is high up the neck in the third shape of the C# minor pentatonic scale. This is the relative minor of E major, a go-to key for Mayer. For an authentic vibe, you could ditch the pick and get stuck in with fingers. The first bar is made up of two 8th notes followed by three beats of 16th notes. The 16th notes contain some rests, which are easiest to explain if we count the beats in the bar as 1 & 2 e & a 3 e & a 4 e & a. The first rest is on the & of beat 2, the next rest is on the e of beat 3, and the final beat has two rests, one on the beat and one on the a. The rests have two played notes between each one. The second half starts the same but with a little note flurry at the end to add some lead guitar.



LICK 5

This high-energy Mayer-style lick in D minor features muted notes and rakes. Each bar kicks off with two muted 16th notes before going into some doublestop hammer-ons. The doublestops with hammer-ons are straight from the Hendrix playbook. Each bar ends with a rake down into a slide. The first bar rakes down three muted strings and lands with a slide on the A string from the 12th to the 10th frets. The second bar only rakes down two strings because we're adding an additional note at the end of the slide, where we pull off to the 8th fret.



TRY IT YOURSELF

Each of these fiery licks can be moved around based on the key in which you're playing. They're mostly based in the pentatonic scale, as you hear these patterns a lot in John Mayer's playing. He's a big fan of combining melodic phrases with rhythmic elements, which can make for great self-accompaniment. If you want to channel some Mayer vibes, grab your Strat, flip it to position four (neck and middle pickup) and have some fun.

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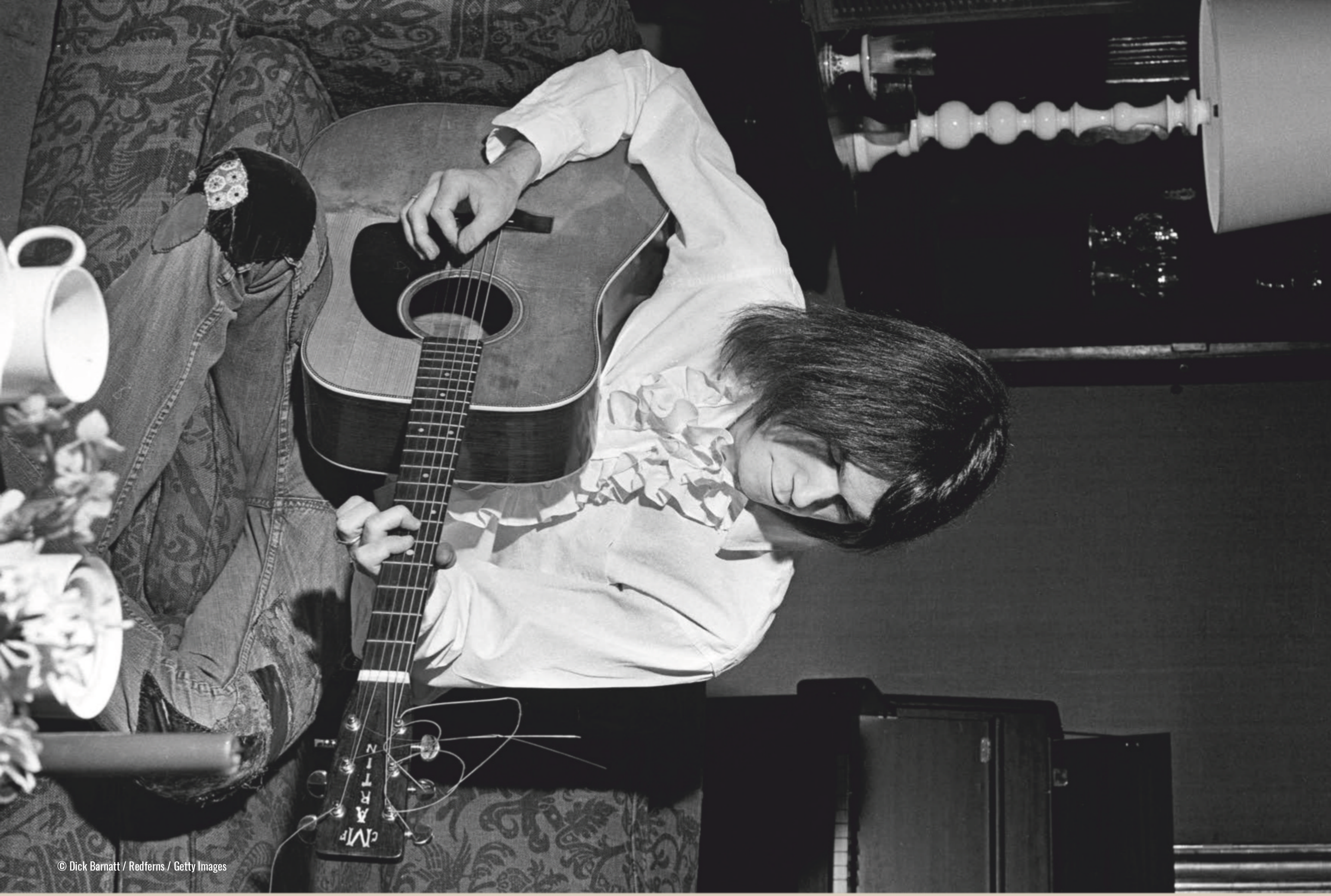

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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE NEIL YOUNG PART 1

WORDS ROD FOGG

Master the shapes and patterns that made Neil Young one of the world's most beloved and imitated songwriters…

Neil Young was present at the birth of folk rock, releasing three albums in the second half of the 1960s alongside Stephen Stills and Richie Furay in Buffalo Springfield. Upon turning solo in 1968, Young's music went on to incorporate elements of everything from country, rockabilly and blues to rock and raucous grunge-like guitar. With his 39th solo album *Colorado* released in 2019, his vast back catalogue continues to be a fascinating source of innovative and original guitar playing.

Equipped with a high tenor voice and a determination to follow wherever his musical inspirations lead him, Young uses chords in many creative ways. Sometimes he switches back and forth between chords to develop riffs. He may subtly remove a finger to sound out an open string. He might add an extra note to make a voicing more interesting. Nothing is off limits.

FIGURE 1

The chords in this example could be played in the style of a two-bar riff. Switch back and forth between the C and D chords in bar 1, then echo that rhythm with the F5 and G5 chords in bar 2. While a lot of Young's progressions have a country tinge, this feels like it would work better as Crazy Horse-era rocker. Try it out on your electric with some edgy tweed overdrive.

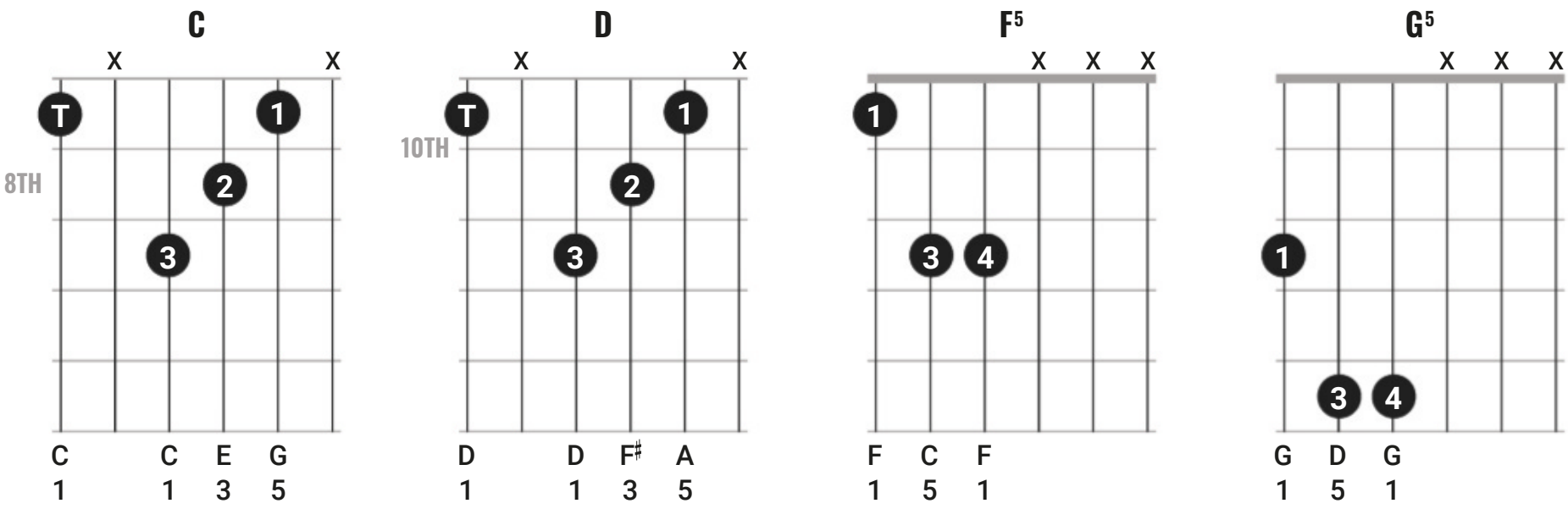
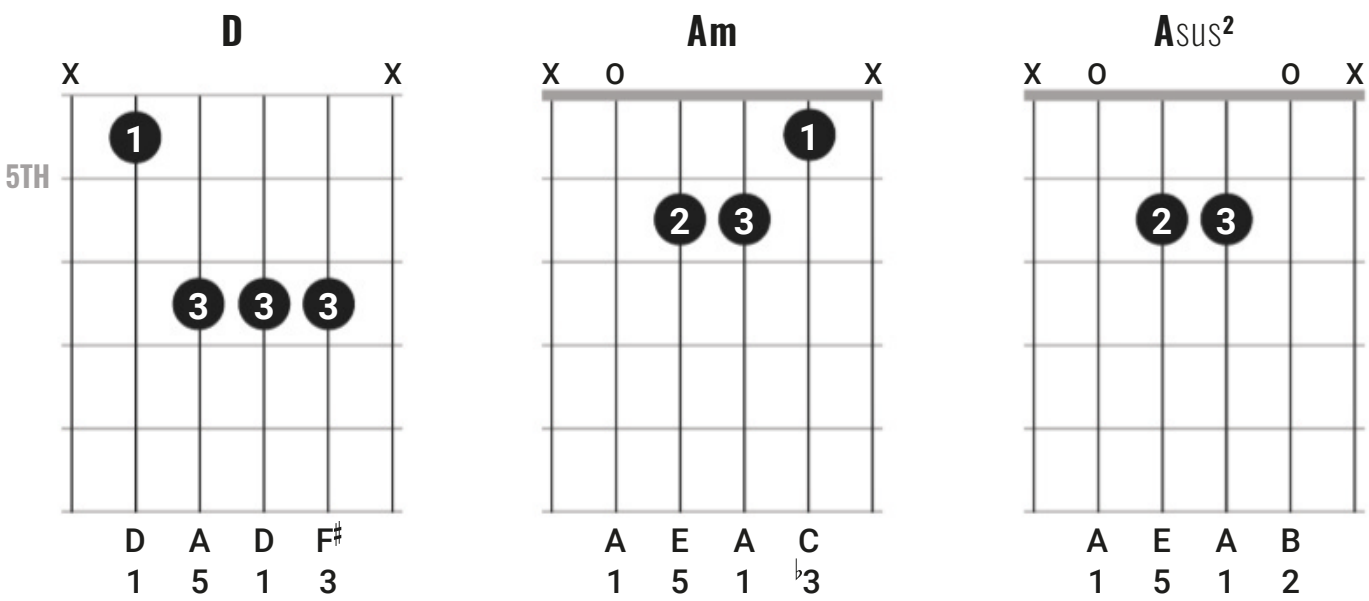


FIGURE 2

Try playing these chords as a four-bar sequence, in which finger one is removed and replaced in the A minor chord to alternate between A minor and Asus2, adding an unusual melodic touch. It'll sound superb on an acoustic guitar with a steady grooving strumming pattern but will work just as well doubled on a clean electric with the chords arpeggiated. Tidy strumming and fingering is required to avoid sounding any unwanted open strings, particularly in the G/B slash chord, where fingers two and four mute the outer two strings.



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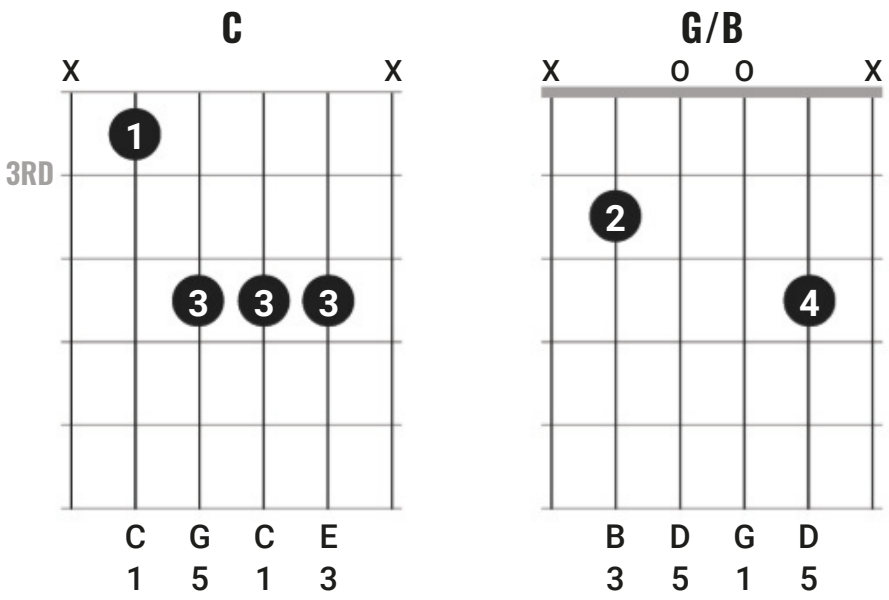


FIGURE 3

You could inject this simple progression with some additional zest by using open strings. Adopt a slow tempo and try strumming while switching between C and Cmaj9, releasing and replacing fingers one and two but holding finger three, and then into the G. You can mute the low E string on the C chords either with the tip of your third finger or by allowing your thumb to come up over the top of the neck.

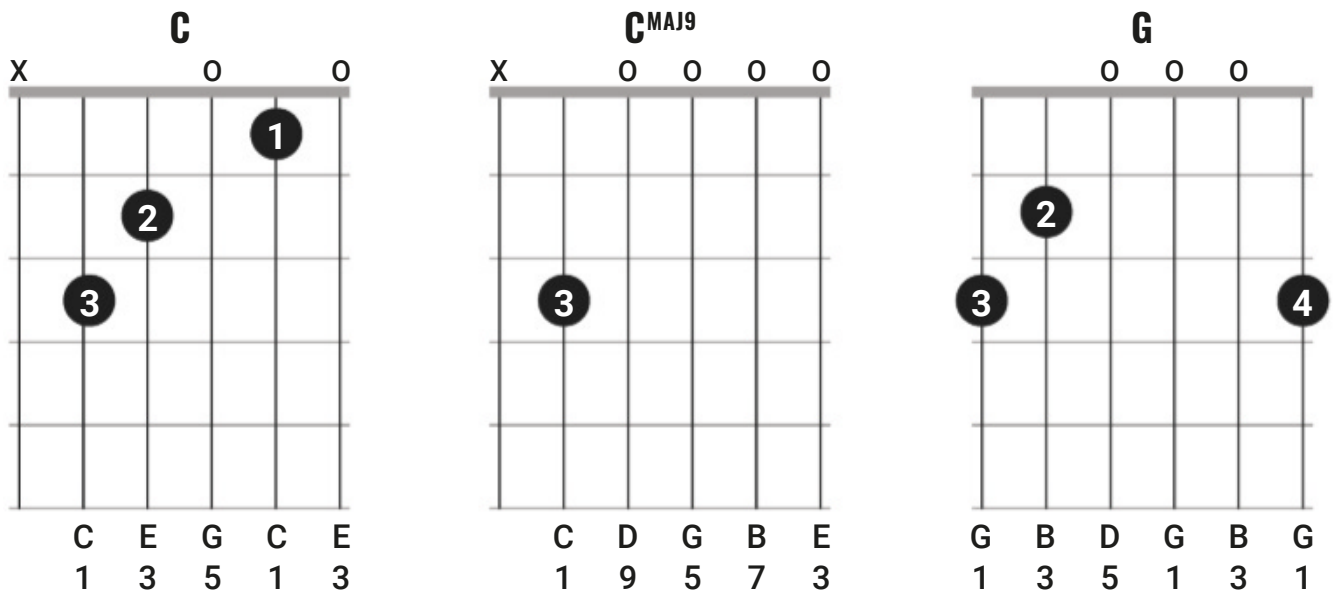


FIGURE 4

Young is not averse to strumming big fat barre chords or to using unusual keys. With the Bminor add11, the idea is to hammer on with the first finger at the 2nd fret on the top string about halfway through the bar, moving on to E in the second bar. Repeat this and then play C#m and F# before heading back to Bm and E, making eight bars in total. This example is inspired by an intro that leads to a verse based around A, Bm, E and A.

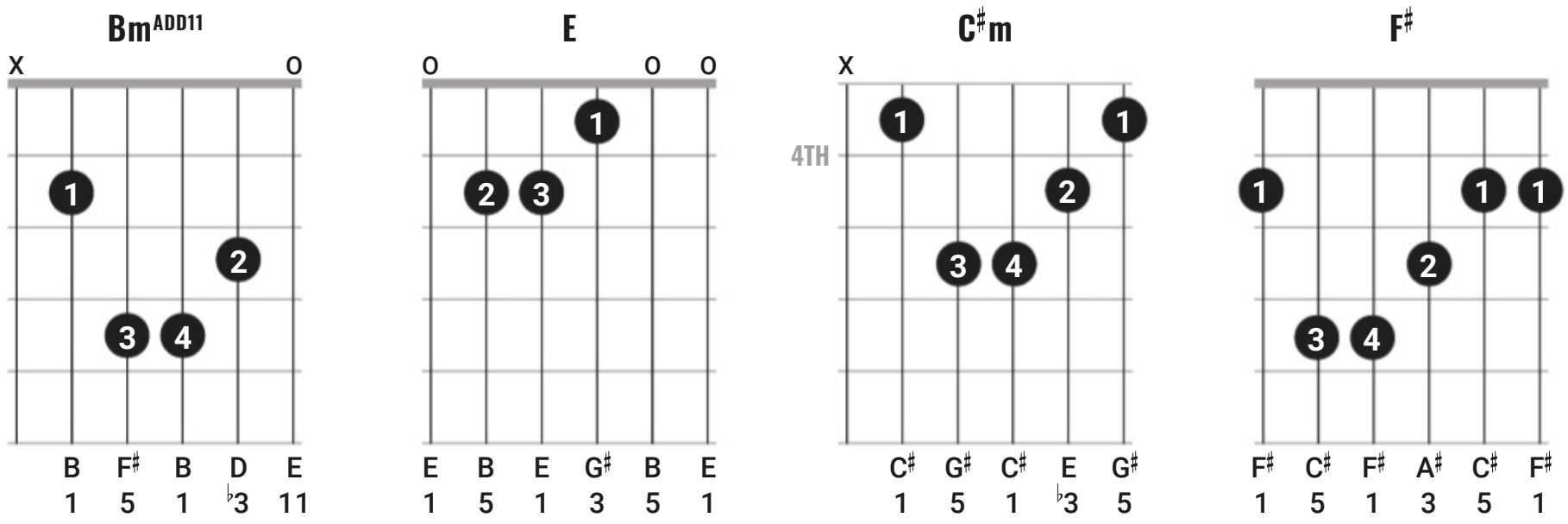


FIGURE 5

In this example, you need to separate the bassline and then strum the upper notes of the chord. This should give you a classic root-and-fifth bassline of the flavour often heard in country music. The interest comes from releasing the second finger on the D chord when you pick the A bass note, this being another example of adding interest to a chord sequence by tactically releasing one or more fingers. For the G major chord, the optional bassline would alternate between the low G on the E string and the open D string.

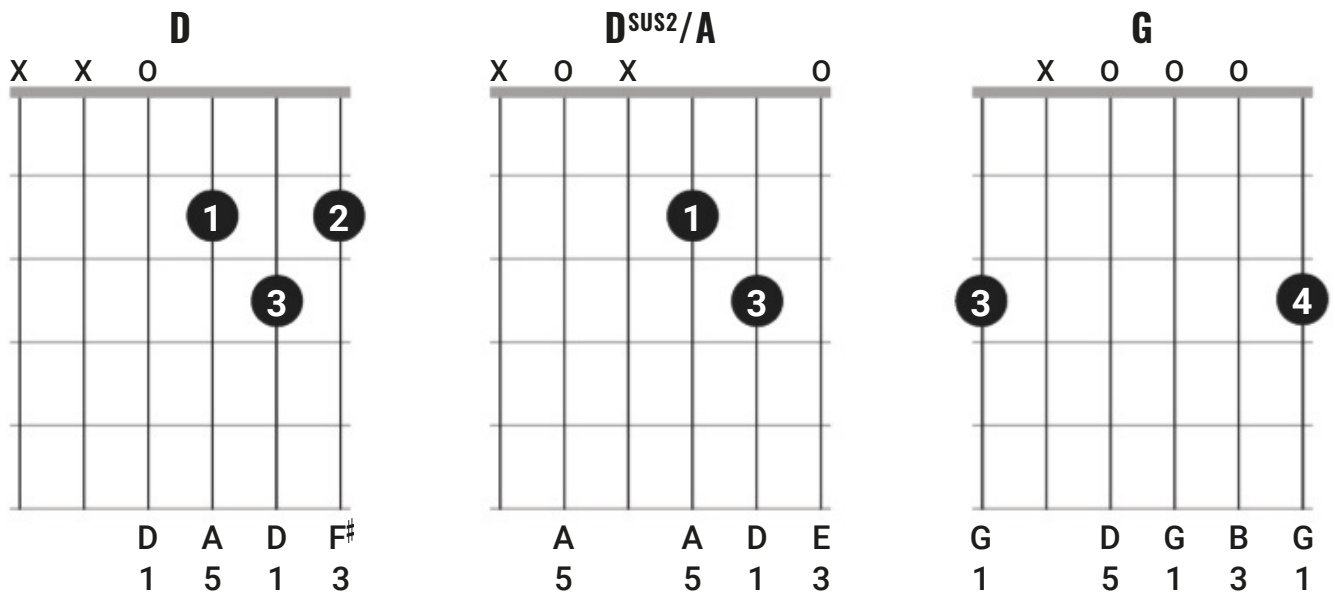
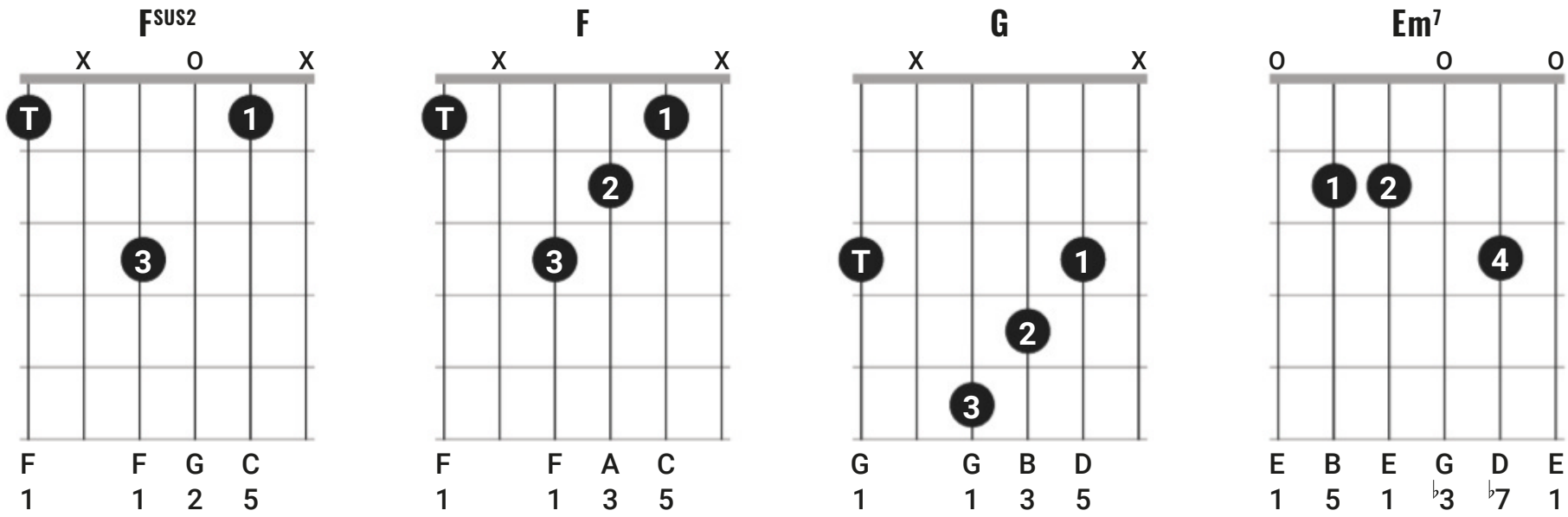


FIGURE 6

Our final example could work as a two-bar idea and would sound even better with a hammer-on from the open G string to the 2nd fret with finger two, converting the Fsus2 chord to F major. Follow this up with a bar of G and Em7. We're back to rock rather than country here, so add a touch of drive to your tone and go for a medium tempo.



Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher, and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), the *Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to best-seller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

TALKBOX

ANDY MARTIN

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The YouTube demo guitarist extraordinaire has played through practically every pedal in existence and earned a huge following along the way. Here, he talks Led Zeppelin, Gary Numan, and the joy of jazz

The moment it all started...

"Watching Led Zeppelin's *The Song Remains The Same* on VHS when I was about 11 years old. I specifically remember Page's violin bow solo in *Dazed And Confused* melting my fragile young mind. I knew I wanted to play guitar before but this solidified it and also started my love for the Les Paul."

I couldn't live without my...

"It's hard to pick one but my father has been building guitars for me since I started playing. I guess I'd go with the very first one, Brownie, which was made from a 100-year-old piece of burl walnut. It's what I learnt on, not just technique but electronics and how parts-swapping can really affect a guitar's tone and playability."

The one that got away...

"I tend to keep everything, even the very first electric guitar I touched, which was a red Ibanez Destroyer II. I thought about selling it but it holds too many memories!"

My signature model...

"I've always loved Gibson-style guitars, from the lighter tension of 24.75-inch scale to the weight and construction of the body. Over the past few years, I've really come to appreciate the little details that improve my playing abilities, such as compound radius fretboards, low-friction nuts, locking tuners and low-output humbuckers with a treble bleed circuit. My fingers prefer a darker fretboard because finished maple always seems to slow them down. It just feels more natural to have no barrier between your fingers and the 'board."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"I tune up. Then I tend to play sustaining chords or arpeggios to hear the voice of the guitar – if I've never picked it up before – or I try to work out a new melody that reflects the mood I'm in. I rarely pick up a guitar and jump into a solo, that's something I have to work myself up to."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"I remember an interview where John Paul Jones said that John Bonham's drumming was a bass player's dream, or something to that effect. It made me think about the importance of listening to the other musicians in your band. The advice that I absorbed was to step back sometimes and listen to what the music is saying as a whole. Guitar players tend to want the spotlight but my favourite bands are those with amazing rhythm sections."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"During a gig with my band, there was a song where I used a capo. This had never been a problem before but that night I completely forgot what fret I put it on. Was it the second or the third? To make matters worse, my concentration was completely thrown, and I not only forgot how to play the song but the guitar was out of tune from said capo. It quickly derailed and I had to give the band a big 'hold up!' wave and crash the song. As you do, I just blamed the problem on the guitar and moved onto the next song!"

My guilty pleasure...

"I love Gary Numan because there are no guitars. Sometimes I just need a recharge. Others listen to classical for that, I listen to 1980s synth music. Although, there are some great riffs that could easily translate to guitar. I just like riffs, anything with riffs or interesting and unorthodox chord changes."

I'm in the band...

"Well, this might be obvious by now but Led Zeppelin. I would have been happy just playing rhythm guitar too. I would have loved to have felt the energy they put out on stage."

I wish I was there...

"This is difficult because there are two live albums that really shaped me at a young age, The Who's *Live At Leeds* and Jimi Hendrix's *Band Of Gypsys*. I'll say Hendrix just to witness the legendary performance of *Machine Gun*. The way that he translated the screams, gunfire and explosions of the Vietnam war with his guitar still gives me goosebumps. It's not only a moving piece but contains all the guitar elements that people are still trying to recreate: fuzz, vibe, wah and Octavia."

If I could just play one thing...

"Jazz, jazz, jazz! I love players like Wes Montgomery, Joe Pass and Django Reinhardt. I've listened to jazz for years but never studied or really grasped the approach. More than classic rock-god tone, I'll be chasing jazz all my life."

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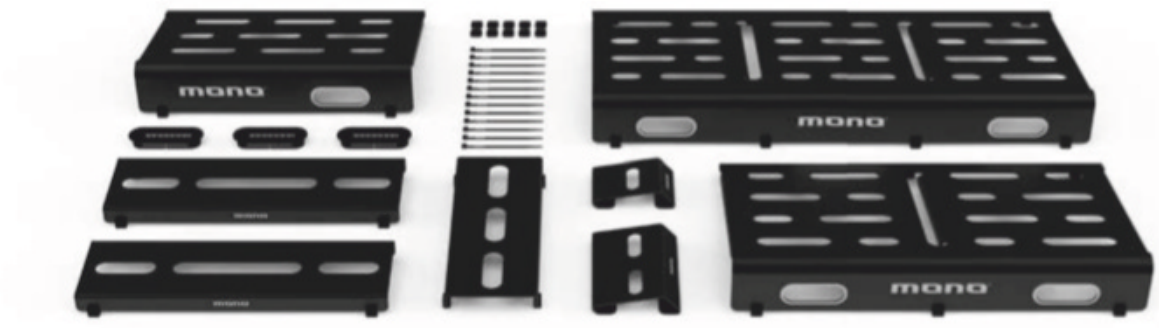

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